

Smith Street Revitalization Plan

July 2020



MAYOR JORGE O. ELORZA
CITY OF PROVIDENCE

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to the community members, leaders, consultants, and City staff who contributed to this Plan.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



OAKLAND AVE

YARSALE
SPARROW ST
VINTAGE JUNK
NICK NACKS
ANTIQUES
SAT 9-11



INTRODUCTION

The Smith Street Revitalization Plan is an action agenda for neighborhood improvement for Smith Street and adjacent areas within the Smith Hill neighborhood between I-95 and Tyndall Avenue.

The Plan is the culmination of efforts led by residents, local partner organizations, and the City of Providence to improve the quality of life for the diverse and passionate community of Smith Hill. Based on existing neighborhood conditions and public participation, the Smith Street Revitalization Plan builds off of previous and on-going planning initiatives to include a series of specific goals and strategies related to the redevelopment and improvement of public and private property including the following key elements:

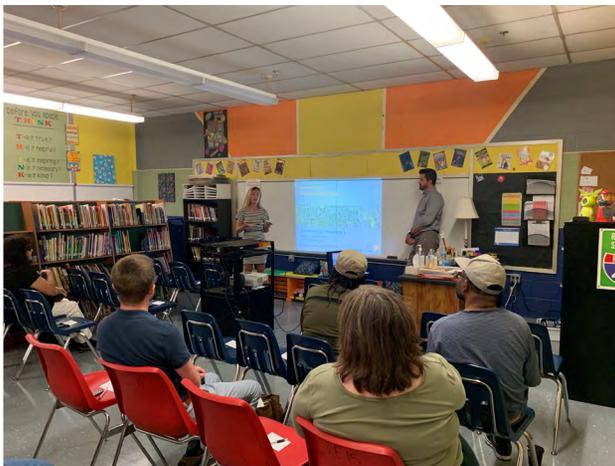
- Streetscape and mobility improvements
- Cultural and arts planning
- Education, safety, health and supportive services
- Housing and economic development



A gateway sign into Smith Hill at the Sons of Jacob Synagogue near the intersection at Orms Street and Douglas Avenue.

The Plan identifies more than twenty projects for physical, cultural, and service-oriented improvements. Many of these projects leverage and build upon existing neighborhood assets such as the Smith Hill Library, Harry Kizirian Elementary School, the neighborhood's active community organizations such as the Smith Hill Partners' Initiative (SHPI) and Smith Hill Advocacy and Resource Partnership (SHARP), and the community's incredible diversity. Other projects address challenges identified throughout the planning process including, but not limited to, the need for safer roads and sidewalks, additional affordable housing opportunities, and a more attractive

commercial corridor. Collectively, these projects are intended to have a catalytic effect to set the stage for further public and private investment to enhance and revitalize the Smith Hill neighborhood.



LISTENING AND LEARNING THROUGH A COMMUNITY PROCESS

The Smith Street Revitalization Plan formally kicked off in Fall 2019 and concluded in Spring 2020. The Plan was designed as a community-led process that invited residents and stakeholders to the table to provide input and feedback in a variety of ways.

The first community meeting, held in September 2019, introduced the project to the general public and provided opportunity for discussion regarding the most pressing community needs and areas of opportunity.

The second community meeting, held in November 2019, included a visioning activity on how to best leverage and enhance four Focus Areas along the Smith Street Corridor to bring the most positive catalytic change to the neighborhood.

Key person interviews were conducted throughout the planning process to gain further understanding of neighborhood conditions directly from residents and key stakeholders of Smith Hill.

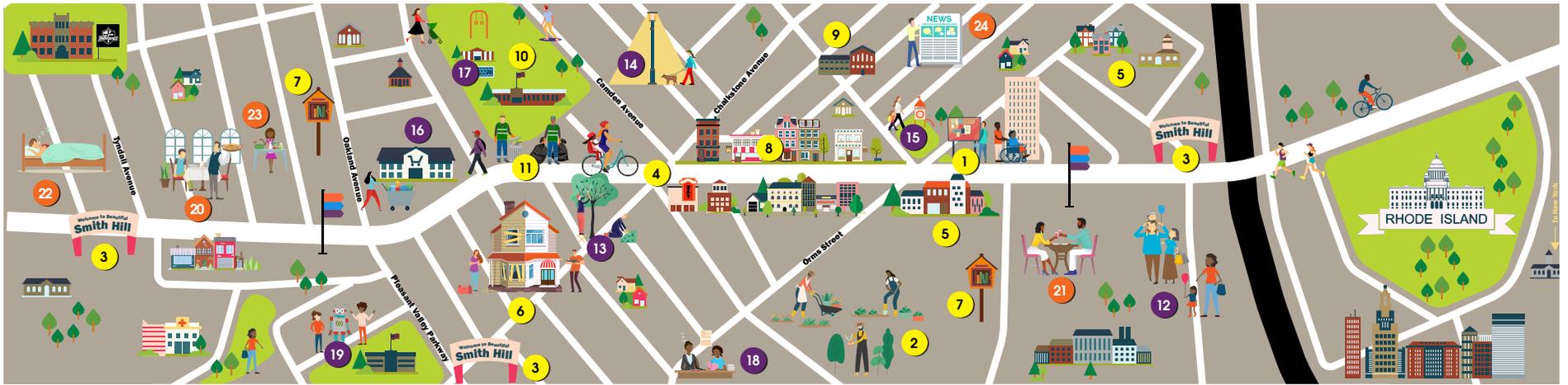
The Steering Committee, which includes local residents, property owners, business representatives, service providers, educational leaders, and public officials, has been essential to the success of this process.



Professor Keith Morton from Providence College describes the history of Smith Hill to members of the Steering Committee.

The Plan benefits from the incorporation of their background and experience of living and working in Smith Hill. The Committee helped develop Plan strategies and a roadmap for implementation. Members of the Steering Committee also provided unique insights into the Smith Hill neighborhood and helped evaluate feedback from larger community meetings. The Committee's on-the-ground knowledge and significant organizational capacities provide the Plan with a strong foundation on which to succeed. The Steering Committee will continue their dedication to Smith Hill by helping to lead implementation efforts going forward.

As part of this effort, a residential and commercial Market Study of the Smith Hill neighborhood was conducted to examine the broader real estate trends that are currently influencing the Planning Area. The Market Study looks at trends in both the citywide and local housing and commercial markets through the lens of existing and future demand. Elements of the Market Study are integrated into the Plan, and the Study is included in the appendix.



High Priority Projects

- 1 Create a Community Bulletin Board (**Early Action Project**)
- 2 Improve Vacant Properties with Pocket Parks, Plazas, and Community Gardens
- 3 Implement Public Art and Signage Improvements
- 4 Implement Changes to Improve Safety for all Road Users as Identified in the Providence Great Streets Master Plan
- 5 Encourage Mixed-Income Housing Development on Key Sites
- 6 Create a Business Façade Improvement Program
- 7 Install Little Free Libraries Throughout the Neighborhood to Encourage Reading
- 8 Establish a Smith Hill Merchants Association
- 9 Improve Smith Hill Library as a Community Learning Anchor and Include Additional Educational Programming for Youth and Adults
- 10 Improve the Schoolyard at Harry Kizirian Elementary
- 11 Improve the Cleanliness of Smith Street

Medium Priority Projects

- 12 Hold a Taste of Smith Hill Festival
- 13 Beautify Smith Hill through Tree Trimming and Landscaping
- 14 Conduct a Neighborhood Lighting Study and Consider a Neighborhood Porch Lighting Program
- 15 Redesign and Connect Russell J Boyle Plaza and Joseph P Hassett Sr Memorial Park for Higher Utilization
- 16 Work with Property Owners to Improve the Attractiveness of the ALDI Commercial Area
- 17 Encourage Greater Utilization of the Rogers Recreation Center
- 18 Encourage Local College Students to Volunteer as Local Tutors
- 19 Establish a Neighborhood STEAM and Robotics Club

Lower Priority Projects

- 20 Create a Smith Hill Restaurant Guide and Food Tour
- 21 Widen Sidewalks to Encourage Outdoor Dining
- 22 Encourage Hotels, Inns, and other Lodging
- 23 Establish an International Restaurant Incubator including Food Industry Training and Food Production Program for Nearby Anchor Institutions
- 24 Establish and Sustain an Online Neighborhood Social Media Presence and Neighborhood Newsletter

THE SMITH STREET VISION

The following statement represents the vision for the community, based on resident and stakeholder feedback:



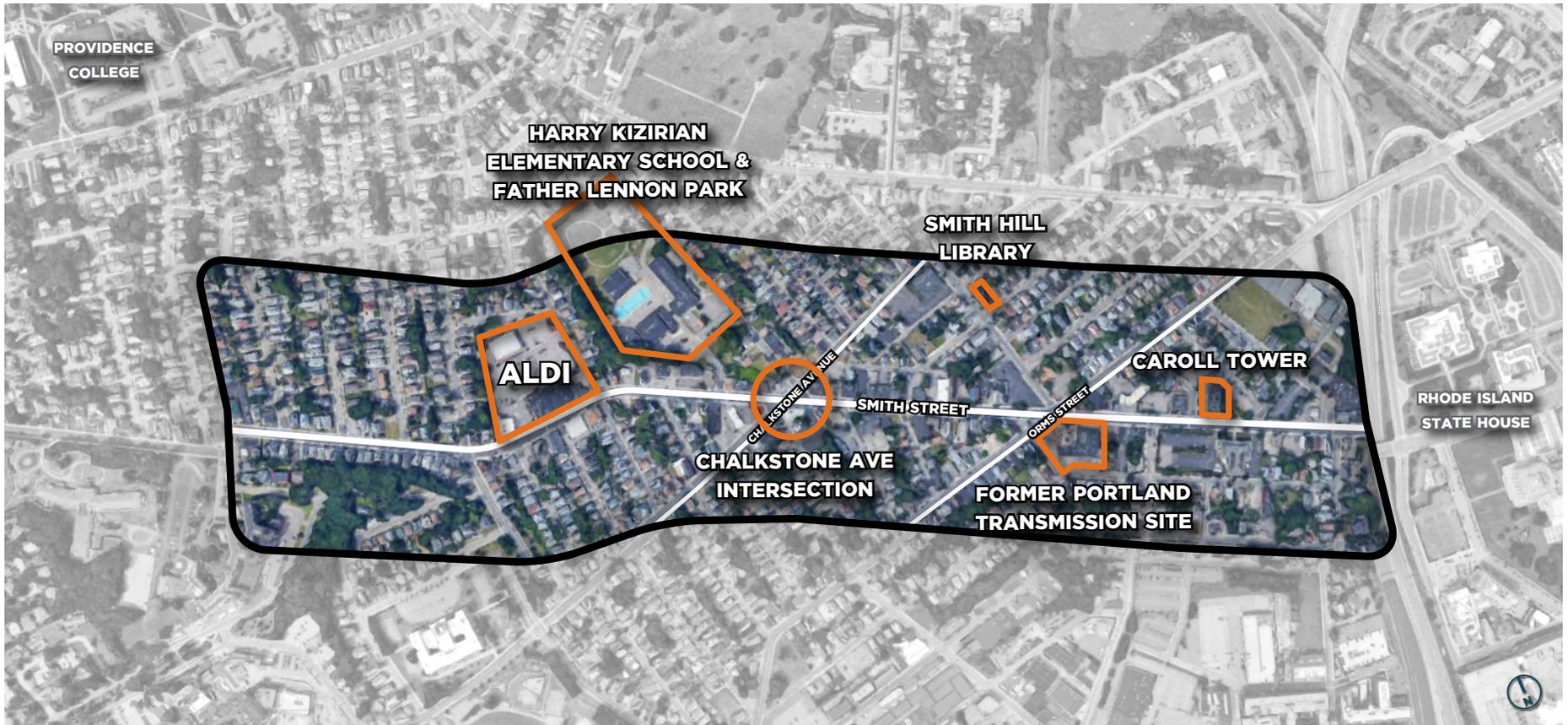
The former Portland Transmission site at the southeast corner of Smith and Orms Streets provides the opportunity for new mixed-use development.

Smith Street is a beautiful, clean, mixed-use, and multi-modal corridor. The Smith Hill neighborhood provides safe and affordable housing for all residents, clean and safe streets for all people, and a diverse mix of businesses. The community's rich history, cultural diversity, and heritage are honored and celebrated while cultivating a sense of unity and collective pride. Vacant properties, small and large, are redeveloped to bring additional housing opportunities across a mix of incomes to the neighborhood. Shared spaces are enhanced and new ones created to attract people to spend time in Smith Hill. Community anchors increase their capacity to promote education and learning for youth and adults alike. Bonds between residents, service organizations, institutions, and local businesses are reinvigorated and help further implementation of community improvements.

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COMMUNITY CONTEXT





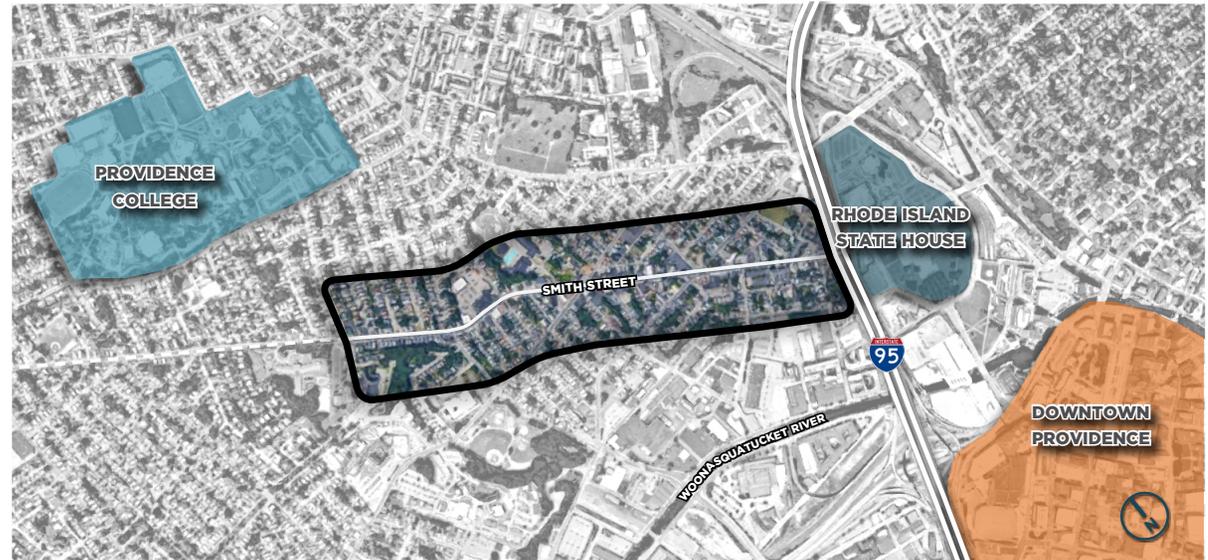
| Planning Area Map

PLANNING AREA

The Planning Area, which is located less than a mile from Downtown Providence, is focused on Smith Street, from Interstate 95 to Tyndall Avenue. Within walking distance of the Planning Area are several regional destinations such as the Rhode Island State House, the Providence Train Station, Providence College and the Woonasquatucket River.

Smith Hill is a dense, mixed-use neighborhood comprised primarily of two- and three-family residences. The Smith Hill Library, Harry Kizirian Elementary School and Saint Patrick Academy are key learning institutions within the project area. Providence College is influential to the community as students increasingly take up residence in the area. Neighborhood-serving organizations such as the Smith Hill Community Development Corporation (SHCDC), Half-Full, the Rogers Recreation Center, and the Sojourner House provide a variety of resources and services to Smith Hill residents.

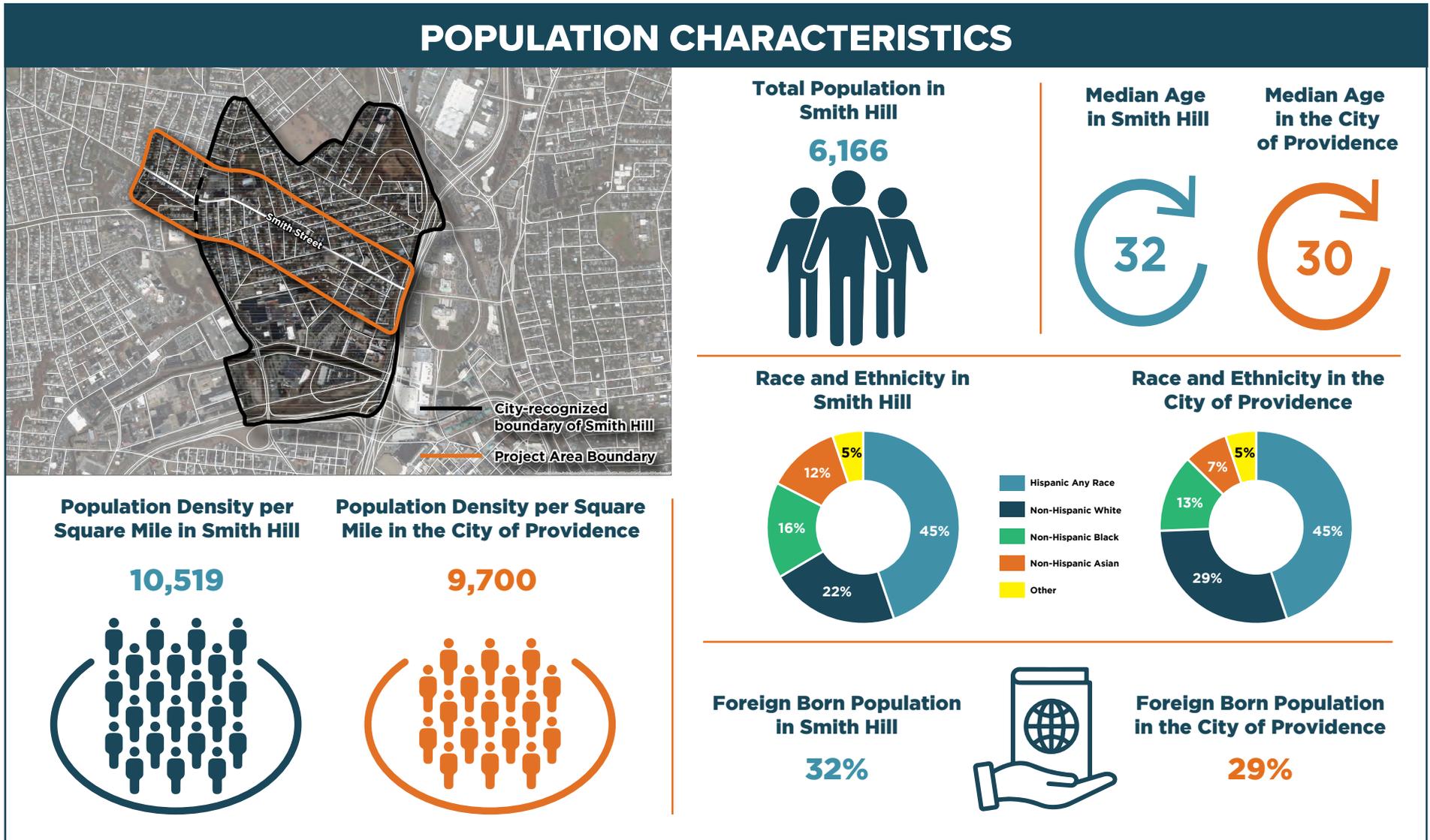
Smith Street is a State-owned and -maintained arterial that functions as the primary commercial corridor for Smith Hill. A variety of businesses, service organizations and residential properties are located along Smith Street including Carroll Towers (a 16-story tower with 199 units managed by the Providence Housing Authority), laundromats, several neighborhood restaurants, and numerous sites for potential redevelopment.



| Planning Area Context Map

SMITH HILL DEMOGRAPHIC OVERVIEW

Demographic information was compiled from the City of Providence Neighborhood Snapshot webpage. This data was derived from a combination of the American Community Survey 5-Year Population Estimates for 2013-2017 (using Census Tracts 44007002600 and 44007002500) and ESRI's 2019 algorithmic population estimates.



ECONOMICS



Median Income in
Smith Hill

\$41,161

Median Income in the
City of Providence

\$42,150



Unemployment Rate
in Smith Hill

8%

Unemployment Rate
in the City of Providence

4%



Cost Burdened Households
(Spending >30% of income on
Housing) in Smith Hill

44%

Cost Burdened Households
(Spending >30% of income
on Housing) in the City of
Providence Hill

43%

HOUSING

Total Housing Units in
Smith Hill

3,150



Percent of all Housing
Units in the City of
Providence

4.27%

(Out of 73,820 Total
Housing Units)

Owner-Occupied
Housing Units

Smith Hill

20%

City of
Providence

35%

Renter-Occupied
Housing Units

Smith Hill

80%

City of
Providence

65%



Median Home Value
in Smith Hill

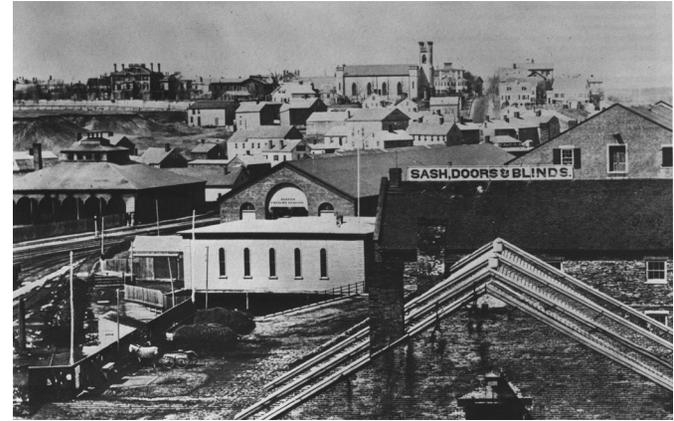
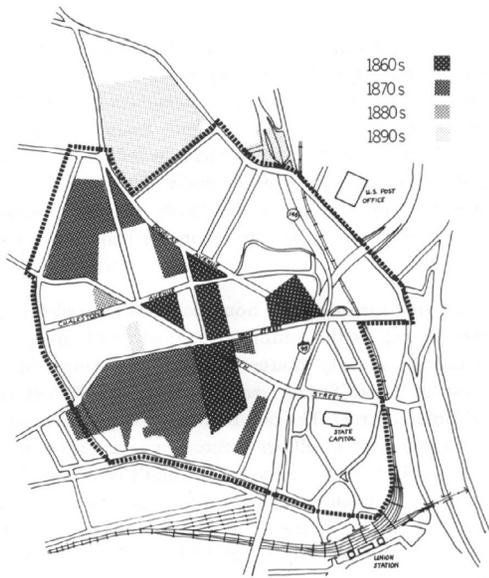
\$170,089



Median Home Value in
the City of Providence

\$192,100





| Historical photos and illustrations of Smith Hill (Source: Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission and the National Register of Historic Places).

HISTORY

Before European settlers arrived in the area that is present-day Rhode Island, the lands of Rhode Island were mainly inhabited by three Native American tribes. To the east of the Narragansett Bay and the Providence River lived the Wampanoags and on the south were the Eastern Niantics. The majority of Rhode Island was occupied by the Narragansetts. According to the Narragansett Indian Tribe, the Narragansett People established their existence in this region more than 30,000 years ago.

Smith Hill was part of Roger Williams' original land grant in 1636, and was used as common land for livestock by early settlers. Smith Hill and the major artery, Smith Street, were named for John Smith, a local mill owner. The Smiths were prominent in the area into the 18th century.

The Douglas Turnpike (Douglas Avenue) was opened in 1807 and Smith Street (also referred to as the Powder Mill Turnpike and Route 44) opened shortly after 1810. Prior to the mid-1800s, Smith Hill was essentially a rural addition to the more developed neighborhoods of East Side and Downtown.

From 1830 to 1930, industrialization and immigration transformed Smith Hill into a dense urban neighborhood. The first wave of immigrants arrived during the 1820s from Ireland. Later, immigrants from Eastern Europe and Balkan countries settled into the area. Extensive construction and

development changed the look of the neighborhood in the 1870s. Many streets were lined with small cottages and multi-family homes to accommodate the growing population of industrial workers. As in the Valley and Olneyville neighborhoods, industry began to decline in Smith Hill after the end of World War II. Between the end of the war and the 1970s, many mills and factories closed and the surrounding residential areas went into decline. In the 1970s several Community Development Corporations (CDCs) began neighborhood revitalization efforts which continue today by the Smith Hill CDC.

Sources:

Providence Journal 'Native Americans shaped Rhode Island's history',
[www.providencejournal.com/
article/20141204/Opinion/312049894](http://www.providencejournal.com/article/20141204/Opinion/312049894)

The Narragansett Indian Tribe
www.narragansettindiannation.org/

The Providence Tomorrow Olneyville, Smith Hill, and Valley Neighborhood Plan
[www.providenceri.gov/wp-content/
uploads/2017/05/Planning-OSV_
NeighbrhdPlan_Digital.pdf](http://www.providenceri.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Planning-OSV_NeighbrhdPlan_Digital.pdf)

ZONING

The Zoning Ordinance is administered by the City of Providence to provide regulations that control the use of property and the physical limitations of that use. The Planning Area includes the following zoning districts:

Residential Districts

R-2 Residential District

The R-2 District accommodates moderate density residential development of single-family, semi-detached, two-family dwellings. Limited neighborhood commercial uses may also be allowed. The maximum building height is 45' and cannot exceed three stories.

R-3 Residential District

The R-3 District accommodates higher density residential development of single-family, semi-detached, two-family, three-family and rowhouse dwellings. Limited neighborhood commercial uses may also be allowed. The maximum building height is 45' and cannot exceed three stories.

R-4 Residential District

The R-4 District accommodates higher density residential development of single-family, semi-detached, two-family, three-family, rowhouse, and multi-family dwellings in areas that minimize negative impacts to lower density residential neighborhoods.



Zoning Map (Source: City of Providence)

Limited neighborhood commercial uses may also be allowed. The maximum building height is 45'.

Commercial Districts

C-1 Neighborhood Commercial District

The C-1 District accommodates areas of small to medium-scale commercial use, typically located along urban corridors. The maximum building height is 45' and cannot exceed four stories.

C-2 General Commercial District

Accommodates more intensive commercial uses and key commercial nodes, including larger retail establishments. The maximum Building Height is 50' and cannot to exceed four stories.

Other Districts

PS Public Space District

Preserves open space areas and areas for public buildings and facilities.

OS Open Space District

Preserves open space areas, conservation areas, and outdoor recreation areas.

Providence Landmark District

The Providence Landmark District is a zoning overlay district that protects and preserves special areas of historic and architectural value. In a local historic district, a design review process guides development and change in a way that preserves important elements of the past for the benefit of future generations.

FUTURE LAND USE

The Future Land Use map envisioned in the 2014 Providence Tomorrow Comprehensive Plan is similar to what currently exists in Smith Hill today, with a few distinctions. The neighborhood remains primarily medium-density residential with lower density residential prioritized west of Oakland Avenue. Neighborhood-serving commercial uses are mostly relegated to Smith Street east of Oakland Avenue and west of I-95 with a few exceptions including the Carroll Tower property.

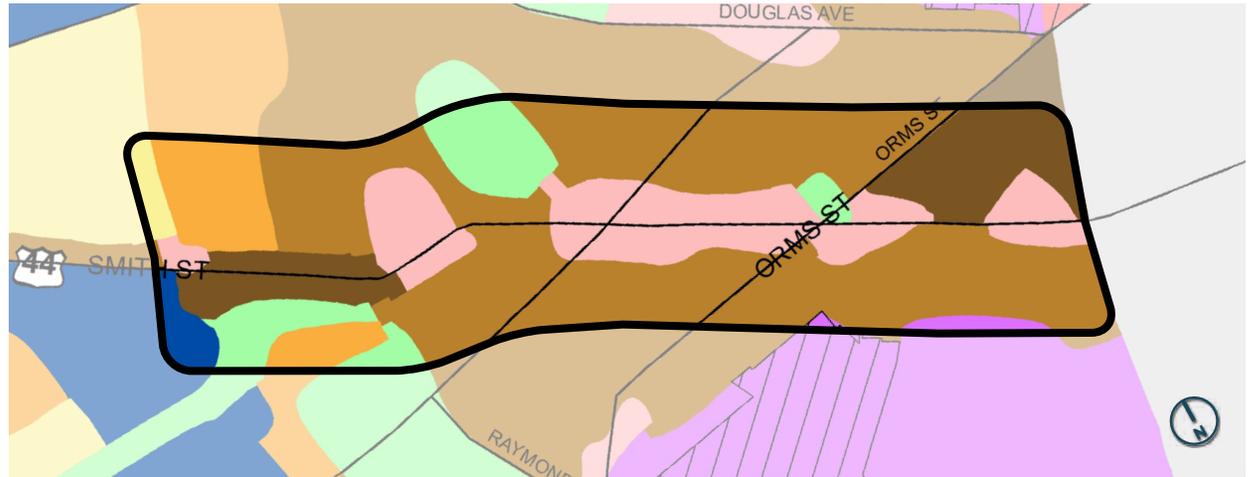
Residential Districts

Low Density Residential

These areas are characterized by one-family and two-family dwellings in detached structures on separate lots. Buildings typically range in height from one to three stories.

High Density Residential

These areas are characterized by multi-family dwellings, with some one, two and three-family dwellings interspersed. Multi-family buildings typically range from three to four stories in height.



Future Land Use Map (Source: City of Providence and the 2014 Providence Tomorrow Comprehensive Plan)

Commercial Districts

Neighborhood Commercial/Mixed-Use

These areas are characterized by traditional, pedestrian and transit-oriented uses that serve local neighborhood needs for convenience retail, services, professional offices, and housing. Buildings are set close to the street, with entrances and facades oriented toward the street. Residential uses are encouraged.

Business/Mixed-Use

These areas are intended to foster the expansion of business, industrial, commercial, office and medium-to-high density residential uses into former manufacturing areas and historic mill buildings.

Other Districts

Public Space/Open Space

These areas are characterized by multi-family dwellings, with some one, two and three-family dwellings interspersed. Multi-family buildings typically range from three to four stories in height.

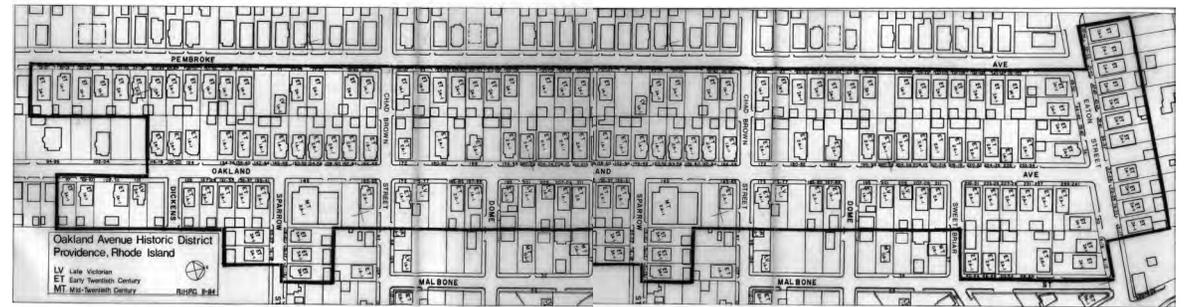
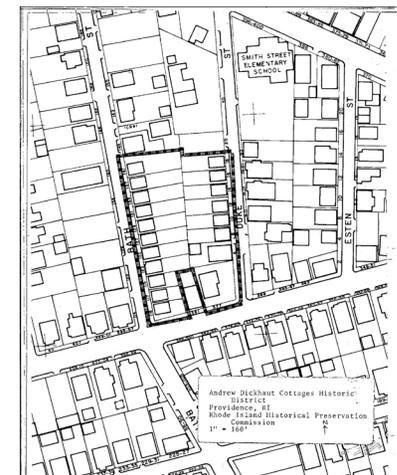
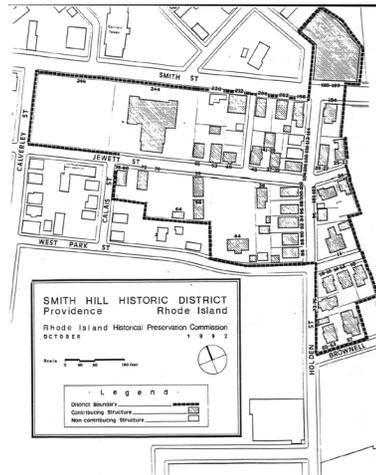
Institutional

These areas, which include both zones and overlays, are institutional campuses, designed to permit institutional growth and development while controlling and limiting negative impacts on neighborhoods.

NATIONAL REGISTER HISTORIC DISTRICTS

The National Register of Historic Places is the United States federal government’s official list of districts, sites, buildings, structures and objects deemed worthy of preservation for their historical significance. National Register Districts identify an area or group of buildings that are significant on a local, state or national level; however, they do not provide regulatory protection through local zoning. Property owners in National Register districts may be eligible for state and federal tax credits for maintenance and renovation. There are four National Register Historic Districts within the Project Area:

- The Smith Hill Historic District,
- The Cottages Historic District,
- The Pekin Street Historic District, and
- The Oakland Avenue Historic District.



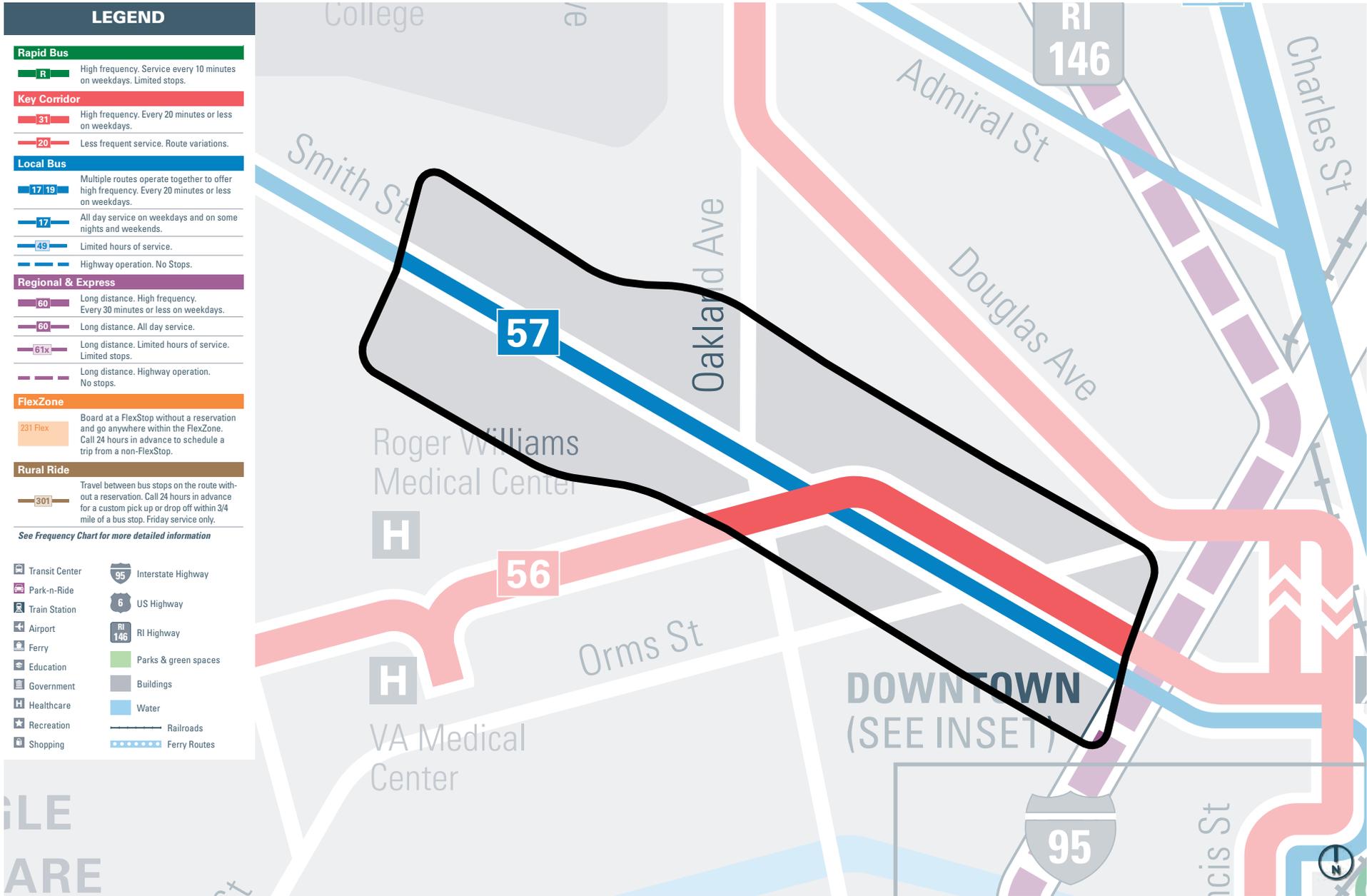
Boundaries of National Register of Historic Districts in Smith Hill
(Source: National Register of Historic Places Inventory Nomination Forms).

PARKS & OPEN SPACE

The Planning Area and surrounding community contain several parks and open spaces, including Father Lennon Park adjacent to Harry Kizirian Elementary School, Russell J. Boyle Plaza and Joseph P. Hassett Sr. Memorial Park at the intersection of Smith and Orms streets, Tom Twitchell Greenway, and Davis Park. According to the City of Providence Neighborhood Snapshot webpage, 100% of Smith Hill residents live within a 5-10 minute walk to a public park.



| Parks and Open Space Map (Top), Joseph P Hassett Sr Memorial Park (Bottom).



Public Transportation Map (Source: Rhode Island Public Transit Authority)

TRANSPORTATION

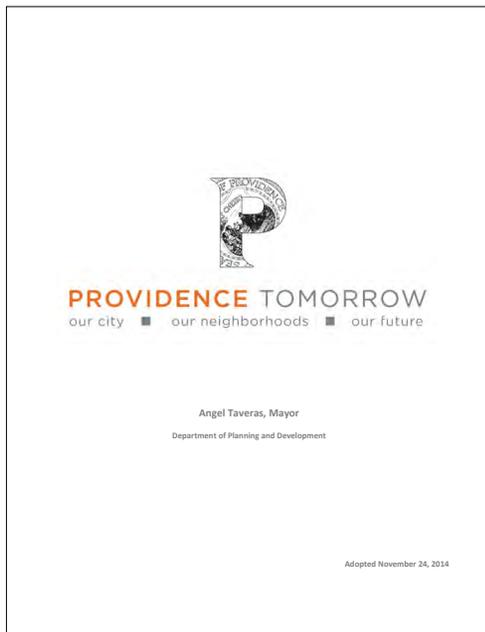
According to the 2013-2017 American Community Survey, an estimated 82% of residents in the project area drove their car to work while only 5% used public transit. The Rhode Island Public Transit Authority's (RIPTA) operates bus routes 56 and 57 on Smith Street every 15 and 30 minutes respectively on weekdays. There is currently no bike infrastructure in the project area, but the City's Great Streets Master Plan proposes a two-way, separated shared-use path along Smith Street as part of the citywide Urban Trail Network. The eastern portion of the neighborhood is a 10- to 15-minute walk to the Providence Train Station which provides access to Massachusetts' Bay Transportation Authority Commuter Rail Service and Amtrak regional rail service. Just east of the neighborhood is Interstate-95 providing north-south access throughout the region.



| Neighborhood Vision Map for Smith Hill (Source: The Providence Great Streets Master Plan)

PREVIOUS AND ONGOING PLANNING EFFORTS

Providence Tomorrow Smith Hill Neighborhood Plan (2009)



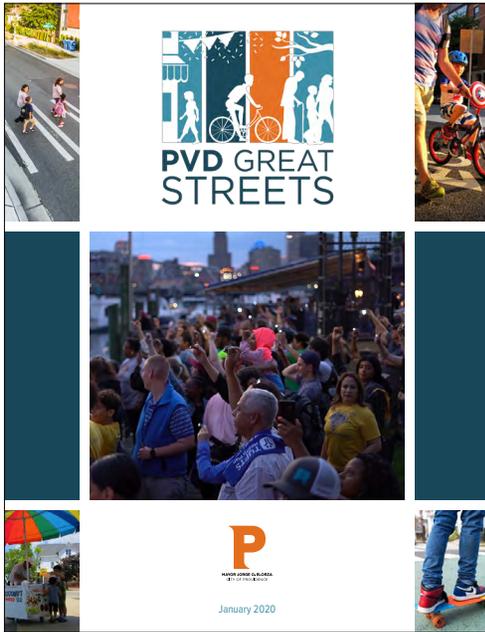
Prior to adoption of the Providence Tomorrow Comprehensive Plan, the City undertook detailed planning studies for each of the City's 25 neighborhoods. From the introduction:

"This plan summarizes neighborhood history and demographics, illustrates existing neighborhood character through building typologies, and identifies key issues and neighborhood priorities. The most important part of this report is the Action Plan, which identifies short-, mid- and long-term goals for the neighborhoods and the parties that will lead each effort. The Action Plan identifies not only City-led actions, but those projects that can be initiated by groups of residents working together. This report will be used to guide the review of development projects in the Olneyville, Valley and Smith Hill neighborhoods by City boards and commissions, and will help prioritize funding for projects and infrastructure improvements, as well as provide a guide for redevelopment efforts."

Some of the initiatives identified in the plan that overlap with the Smith Street Revitalization Plan include:

- Work to create a **neighborhood gateway** at the intersection of Smith Street and Chalkstone Avenue and preserve the views of the state capitol from this intersection.
- Increase **enforcement of City environmental ordinances** regarding trash and recycling.
- Increase opportunities for and access to **safe and affordable housing**.
- Work with utility companies to quickly **replace lights** that are damaged or knocked down by vehicles in industrial areas.

Providence Great Streets Master Plan (2020)



In early 2019, the City kicked off the Providence Great Streets Initiative to improve the public realm of the City's neighborhoods. Central to this work is the principle that every street in Providence should be safe, clean, healthy, inclusive, and vibrant. After conducting public meetings throughout 2019, the City released the Providence Great Streets Master Plan in January 2020. The most important Great Streets project related to the Smith Street Revitalization Plan is the creation of an Urban Trail along Smith Street:

Project List

Street or Trail Name	From	To	Project Type	Why is this important?	Recommendation	Implementation Action
Dean	Atwells	Valley	Urban Trail	Connects across key gap in pedestrian, bicycle, and micromobility access between Federal Hill, Valley, and Smith Hill	Two-Way Urban Trail with Accessible Sidewalk	Move curbs
Dean/Raymond/Oakland/Davis Park Path	Valley	Smith	Urban Trail	Connects school and major neighborhood park and fills network gap between the Woonasquatucket River and Smith Street	Two-Way Shared Use Path	Move curbs, Enhance quality of existing facility
Woonasquatucket River Greenway Extension	Eagle	Park	Urban Trail	Project in design that extends Woonasquatucket River Greenway into Downtown	Two-Way Shared Use Path	Remove travel lane (Road Diet)
Smith	Oakland	Orms	Urban Trail	Completes Smith Hill connection from Oakland to College Hill; enhancing access to schools, parks, downtown, and other destinations	Two-Way Urban Trail with Accessible Sidewalk	Consolidate parking one side
Smith	Orms	Park	Urban Trail	Extends proposed Smith Urban Trail by State Capitol west to Smith Hill neighborhood; enhances access to park	Two-Way Urban Trail with Accessible Sidewalk	Remove parking one side, Narrow travel or parking lane (Lane Diet)
Smith	Park	Canal	Urban Trail	Provides connectivity through State Capitol area to new Urban Trail on Canal St.	Two-Way Urban Trail with Accessible Sidewalk	Remove travel lane (Road Diet)
Charles/Mill/Canal	Ashburton/Randall	Smith	Urban Trail	Connects to new Canal Urban Trail and proposed W. River St. Urban Trail; moves toward better access to Downtown from Charles and Mount Hope	Two-Way Urban Trail with Accessible Sidewalk	Remove travel lane (Road Diet), Move curbs
Oakland	Smith	Eaton	Urban Trail	North-south connection between neighborhoods; enhances access to Providence College, Davis Park, and schools; extends proposed Dean/PVP Urban Trail north	Neighborhood Greenway	Neighborhood Greenway Toolbox (Speed management, major intersections, wayfinding)
Douglas	Orms	Eaton	Urban Trail	Enhances access to parks, schools, and Providence College	Two-Way Urban Trail with Accessible Sidewalk	Consolidate parking one side

| **Project List recommendations for Smith Hill** (Source: Providence Great Streets Master Plan).

“Work with RIDOT to implement an Urban Trail on Smith Street (a state-owned and state-maintained street) from Canal Street to Whitford Avenue in Elmhurst. This would connect with the new Canal Street Urban Trail, traversing the steep grade and passing over I-95, enhancing east-west connectivity for the neighborhood. A project on Smith Street would also be an opportunity to address some of the neighborhood comments related to speeding and crossing the street on Smith Street, especially between Oakland Avenue and Orms Street.”

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LISTENING & LEARNING: COMMUNITY FEEDBACK



LISTENING & LEARNING

The Smith Street Revitalization Plan's action agenda for neighborhood change was created with robust input from Smith Hill residents, stakeholders, and neighborhood leaders. In addition to regular meetings with the Steering Committee, a series of community meetings and key person interviews were held to generate feedback and vet ideas on how the City and community could best improve the Smith Street corridor.



Key person interviews with local residents and stakeholder organizations were conducted throughout the Planning Process. A seven-foot wide map of the area was printed to help shed light on existing challenges and areas of opportunity in the Smith Hill neighborhood.

Steering Committee Meeting 1 & Key Person Interviews Desired Outcomes



Create more opportunities for **affordable housing**



Transform the former Portland Transmission site into a **mixed-use development** that addresses multiple community needs (more housing, particularly affordable, student, and/or mixed-income housing, and commercial services such as a bank or pharmacy)



Create more opportunities for **parks and open space**



Ensure cleaner, more beautiful and better maintained **streets and sidewalks**



Improve neighborhood **safety**



Ensure that more people are visiting Smith Street from the **State House/Capitol Complex**. Greater utilization of the State House grounds by Smith Hill residents



Develop a neighborhood **newsletter**



Improve relationships between **Providence College** faculty/students and Smith Hill residents



Construct more **one-bedroom apartments**



Create **gateways** into Smith Hill that are well-defined, attractive, and welcoming



Ensure **Community members** taking notice and wanting to get involved with implementation of the Plan



Improve **road/pedestrian safety**



Attract businesses to the Smith Street corridor and create opportunities to keep money circulating within the community



Improve the reputation of Smith Hill and create a **cohesive identity** through high quality branding



Redevelop vacant properties with housing or parks



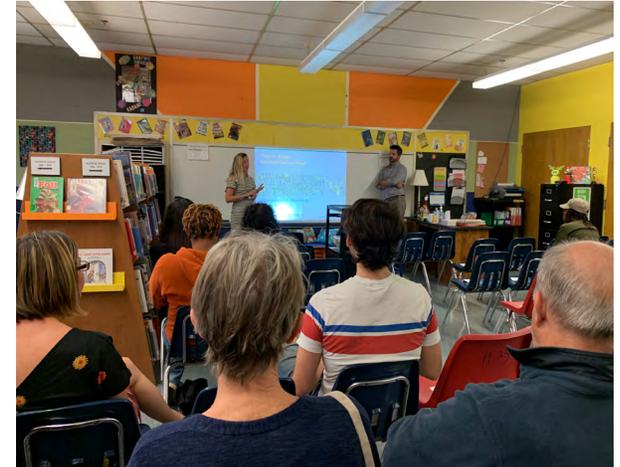
Hold more **events and activities** in the neighborhood

Vision Words from Community Meeting 1

Community meeting attendees were asked to write down three words that represent the **Smith Hill neighborhood TODAY**. The most commonly used words are illustrated below:



Meeting attendees were also asked to write down three words that best described their VISION for the **Smith Hill of TOMORROW**. The most commonly used words are illustrated to the below:



Councilwoman Kat Kerwin kicks off the first Community Meeting with opening remarks. The meeting was held on Monday September 16, 2019 at the Harry Kizirian Elementary School.

Community Meeting 1 Resident and Stakeholder Polling Results

Utilizing keypad polling, meeting attendees were later asked if the neighborhood was either 'getting better', 'getting worse', or 'staying the same'. Most meeting attendees thought Smith Hill was 'getting better' or 'staying the same'. Only 5% of attendees thought Smith Hill was getting worse. These results reflected an optimistic viewpoint from the community that the challenges of Smith Hill today do not outweigh its immense potential for a brighter future.



Nearly even split whether the Smith Hill **neighborhood is on the upswing or about the same**; Only 5% said it is going downward.



Preference to **improve the condition of area buildings and open spaces** to improve the neighborhood's identity.



Less consensus on what type of **affordable housing** is needed: 41% said multi-family housing, 35% said housing for younger people, 24% said single- or two-family housing units.



Transportation improvements are needed across all modes--bus, bicycling, walking/rolling.



Less consensus on what **streetscape improvements** are most needed--street trees and landscaping (38%), sidewalks and crosswalks (31%), signage and banners (25%).



More restaurants are needed on Smith Street; a pharmacy would also be desirable.



Educational/job training services are the most needed services in Smith Hill followed by recreation opportunities.



How should **arts and culture** be represented? Additional events, performances and festivals (33%); murals and public art (28%), youth-oriented arts and activities (28%)



Improved lighting most needed to address neighborhood **safety concerns**.

Youth Engagement

The Planning Team conducted a Youth Engagement Meeting at the Smith Hill Library on the afternoon of Monday, September 16, 2019. Over 20 neighborhood youth residents ranging from 6-13 years old attended the meeting. Below is a summary of their feelings about the neighborhood.

What are the best things about the neighborhood?

- The library
- Annual block parties
- Friends and family
- Hasset Playground

How would you like to see the neighborhood improve?



Upgrade **Hasset Playground** (expand size / more swings / fix basketball rims / cleaner).



Make the **neighborhood cleaner and attractive**: Plant more street trees and flowers, more public trash cans.



| The Youth Engagement Meeting at the Smith Hill Library on September 16, 2019.



Make the neighborhood **safer**: more street lights to make the neighborhood safer, replace vacant houses with new homes.



Improve **retail options**: more restaurant options, additional shopping options.



Develop more **youth-oriented activities**: art and animation classes, and a video gaming center.



More **opportunities for recreation**: organized sport teams (football and basketball), tournaments, an expanded skatepark, more football fields, a teenage workout center, and better access to nature.



Improve youth **employment**.

Community Visioning Meeting

The Community Visioning Meeting was held on November 5, 2019 at the Smith Hill Community Development Corporation's office. Residents and stakeholders of the Smith Hill community voted on their top three favorite visioning ideas for each of the four Focus Areas: the ALDI commercial area, Harry Kizirian Elementary School, the Smith-Chalkstone intersection, and the Smith-Orms intersection. In some instances, groups felt very passionately about the future of the Focus Areas and voted for more than three ideas. The most preferred visioning ideas were incorporated into the Focus Area renderings.

Virtual Open House

Due to unforeseen circumstances related to the COVID-19 pandemic, a Virtual Open House was organized on May 13, 2020 in place of a traditional public meeting. Over 35 neighborhood residents, leaders, and institutional partners digitally gathered over Zoom to review and provide direct feedback related to the Plan's major elements. The Planning Team reintroduced the Plan's goals, timeline, and community engagement efforts to meeting attendees who may not have been familiar with the project. The Planning Team also formally unveiled the Focus Area renderings and Priority Projects



| The Community Visioning Meeting at the Smith Hill CDC's office on November 5, 2019.

to the public for feedback. Meeting attendees were able to express their thoughts in real time and create a space for active discussion during the presentation. The powerpoint and Public Draft of the Plan were made available on the City's website. Additional public comments and input via email were accepted until May 18, 2020. Public input was then utilized to create the Final Plan.

EARLY ACTION PROJECT

Early action engagement activities include small-scale projects that bring people together as volunteers to achieve visible neighborhood improvements and/or promote community-wide events. \$1,000 of Early Action Funding has been dedicated toward the implementation of the identified Early Action Project. The Planning Team met with the Steering Committee on Tuesday, September 17, 2019 to brainstorm their ideas for an Early Action Project. The following six were identified as the most preferred choices:

- A Taste of Smith Hill Festival
- Tree planting event
- Public art/mural project
- Jobs, opportunities, and training fair
- Neighborhood beautification and clean-up day
- Smith Hill fitness, cultural and historical walk

An online survey of the top six early action projects was created and distributed to Steering Committee members to rank the most preferred project. Out of the 12 responses, A Taste of Smith Hill Festival was the most preferred project followed by a jobs, opportunities, and training fair and a public art/mural project.

OCT 2019

EARLY ACTION PROJECTS



Please check the box of the project option that you feel **should be pursued** in the next few months.

If you are interested in volunteering to help carry out an early action project, **please sign the contact form** below.

If you have an idea for an additional early action project, **please write it in** below.

Funding and resources for early action projects are not always available. If necessary, volunteers will assist the team in identifying possible local funding and resources.

For More Information on the Smith Hill Revitalization Plan

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@ProvPlanning



Taste of Smith Hill Festival



Improved Gateway Project into the Community



Improved lighting in parks and streets



Neighborhood beautification and clean-up day



Public art / mural project



Youth & Police Community Basketball Event



Jobs, opportunities, and training fair



Field Day at the State House Grounds



Tree Planting Event

Would you like to **Volunteer To Help** with an Early Action Project? **Sign Up Below.**

Do you have an idea for a **Future Early Action Project**? List it Below!

Name _____

Phone _____

Email _____

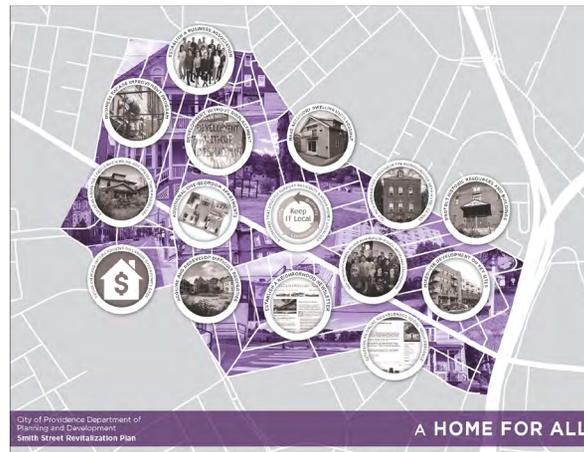
| Early Action Project flyers were distributed at community meetings.

The Steering Committee began organizing the Taste of Smith Hill Festival to coincide with the Smith Hill Block Party in August 2020, with Half-Full as the lead organization. Due to concerns over COVID-19, it was decided to postpone the Taste of Smith Hill Festival. One of the key points of feedback from the Virtual Open House event was the support for a community bulletin board. Accordingly, the project team recommends

shifting resources related to the Early Action Project to the community bulletin board effort as outlined in the Plan on page 55.

THEMES FOR REVITALIZATION

Based on visioning preferences, Themes for Revitalization were developed to help organize potential neighborhood improvements and actions. The Themes were reviewed and discussed with residents and stakeholders at the second community meeting as well as with the Steering Committee. The Themes for Revitalization are not stand-alone options, but are intended to act as “layers” of linked projects which define future neighborhood improvements.



A Home for All

Residents of Smith Hill feel there is a shortage of affordable and new market-rate housing citywide. This planning Theme focuses on providing significant new housing on vacant or underutilized sites throughout Smith Hill. Greatly increasing the supply and mix of housing will allow residents to stay in the community as they transition to different phases of life in addition to offering homes for new residents.

From Community Meeting 1: What should be done with vacant and underutilized lots? - 47% responded, “Affordable or market-rate housing”



A Clean, Green and Safe Community

A Clean, Green and Safe Community includes investing in improved open spaces, natural areas, and walking paths while focusing heavily on cleanup efforts and home and business façade improvements. By creating a safer, cleaner neighborhood, the identity of Smith Hill will greatly improve and the area will become more attractive for reinvestment.

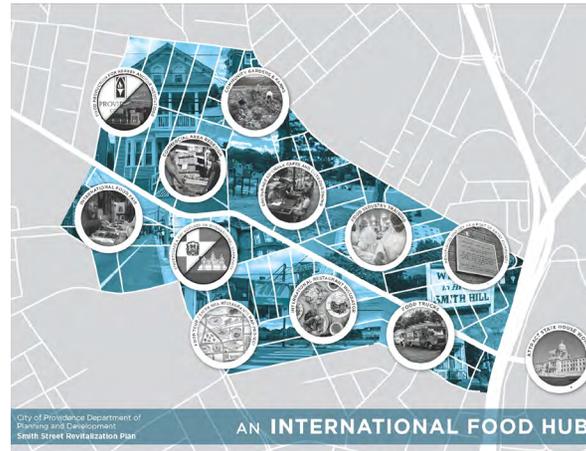
From Community Meeting 1: How should the neighborhood's identity be improved? - 42% responded, “improve the condition of area buildings and open spaces.”



A Neighborhood of Learning

Half of Community Meeting 1 attendees believe that educational or job training resources are the most needed services for the community. The neighborhood should engage nearby anchor institutions, such as Providence College, to become more actively involved in local schools and the Smith Hill Library through academic tutoring. Opportunities for residential and commercial development that benefit students, faculty, and neighborhood residents are welcomed.

*From Community Meeting 1: What types of services are most needed on Smith Street?
- 50% responded, "Educational and job training."*



An International Food Hub

Throughout the Listening and Learning phase of the planning process, local residents frequently acknowledged the neighborhood's diversity as a source of strength and identity. An International Food Hub Theme builds on the rich, historical, and existing international community, along with recent announcements of unique restaurant openings as a strategy for reinvestment and redevelopment. An environment of entrepreneurship should be fostered to help residents build new or expand existing businesses relating to dining, urban agriculture, and food production while fostering a healthier community.

*From Community Meeting 1: What Types of Businesses are Most Needed on Smith Street?
- 47% responded, "restaurants."*

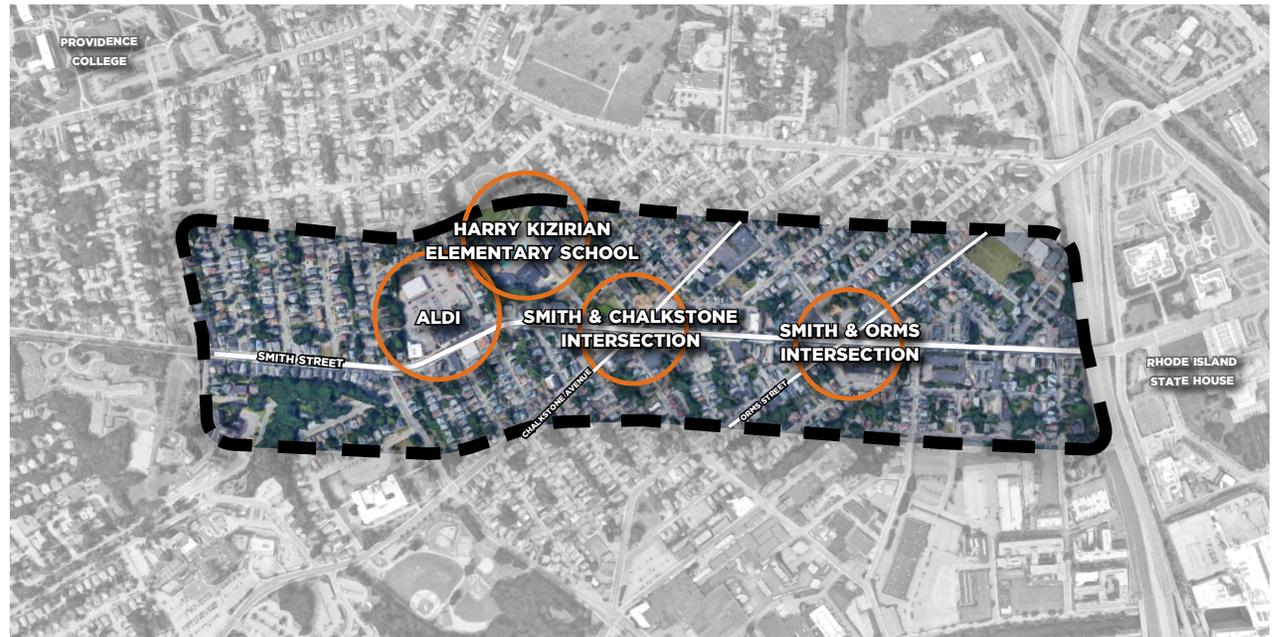
FOCUS AREA VISIONING



FOCUS AREA INTRODUCTION

Four Focus Areas were identified to leverage existing assets and opportunities to bring catalytic improvement and investment to the Smith Street corridor. Two of the identified Focus Areas include the neighborhood's most prominent intersections at Smith and Chalkstone and Smith and Orms. The other two include the area surrounding Harry Kizirian Elementary School and the ALDI commercial plaza. The Focus Area boundaries are not fixed to just one property or intersection but include the general area within a one- to two-block radius.

Each of these Focus Areas have different community functions and thus require different solutions to bring positive revitalization efforts to the corridor. To prioritize these ideas and solutions, residents and stakeholders at Community Meeting 2 participated in a visioning activity for each of the four Focus Areas. The following pages include a description of each Focus Area, their desired community vision, an illustrated rendering showing key elements for reinvestment, and a compiled list of action step items for implementation. It is important to note that each illustrative rendering will not depict the entire area of their respective Focus Area. Many of the key elements are also applicable to other spaces not depicted within the rendering.



| The four identified Focus Areas in the Project Area.

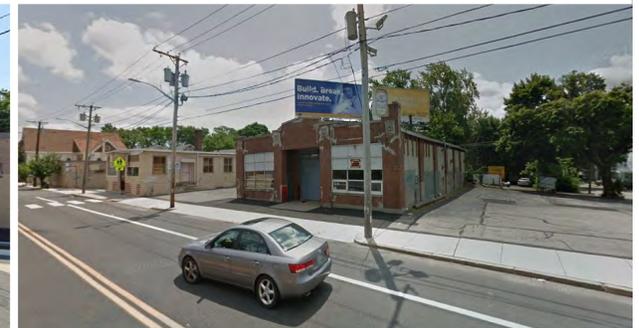
ALDI FOCUS AREA

Existing Conditions

The ALDI Focus Area includes the commercial plaza along the north side of Smith Street between Ruggles and Richter Streets and commercial spaces on the south side of Smith Street. The area is situated at the border of the Smith Hill and Elmhurst neighborhoods with very little gateway indication or signage. The ALDI Plaza is home to ALDI (the only neighborhood grocery store), Popeyes, Advance Auto Parts, Kings Hardware store, Family Dollar, Subway, and Diva Dogg Grooming. Across Smith Street is a vacant auto body shop, Pro-Services Appliance Store, a vacant single-story light industrial building, and La Iglesia de Dios de la Profecia. The lack of clear signage for the commercial plaza along Smith Street negatively affects the site's visibility.

Community Vision

The ALDI Focus Area should continue to serve as a neighborhood commercial destination and should be enhanced through incremental but noticeable physical improvements. The overall appearance of the ALDI facade along Smith Street should be improved through more visible signage, landscaping, and public art. Public trash receptacles should be strategically installed to encourage a cleaner and more attractive



| Existing conditions of the ALDI Focus Area.

urban environment. New pedestrian-oriented street lights and banners should be installed to welcome residents and visitors alike to the Smith Hill neighborhood. Curb extensions should also be introduced to this stretch of Smith Street to make it safer for people to walk across the street and slow traffic. Opportunities for additional affordable or mixed-income housing should be encouraged where possible, including above one-story commercial buildings. The City should continue to explore ways to improve transportation for all road users on Smith Street as outlined in the Providence Great Streets Master Plan. The City's Great Streets Master Plan's most important

recommendation for the ALDI Focus Area (and the rest of Smith Hill) is the installation of a two-way, protected bike lane along the southern side of Smith Street while maintaining on-street parallel parking on the north side of the street. The City should continue to engage the community, local businesses, and property owners in the decision-making process in vetting and implementing the protected bi-directional bike lane as well as other streetscape and safety recommendations from the Providence Great Streets Master Plan.



MIXED-INCOME HOUSING ABOVE EXISTING BUILDING

PEDESTRIAN-ORIENTED STREET LIGHTS AND BANNERS

MURALS AND PUBLIC ART

FACADE IMPROVEMENTS

IMPROVED PEDESTRIAN CROSSING WITH CURB EXTENSION

IMPROVED SIGNAGE FOR EXISTING BUSINESSES

“ Upgrading the overall appearance of the ALDI area while providing additional affordable and mixed-income housing opportunities. ”



LANDSCAPED GREEN WALL

ADDITIONAL PUBLIC TRASH RECEPTACLES

For illustrative purposes only



For illustrative purposes only

The Providence Great Streets Master Plan recommends the installation of a protected bi-directional bike lane along Smith Street.

Action Steps

Short-term (0-1 year)

1. Improve crosswalks to increase visibility and safety for people walking.
2. Identify resources to connect building owners with façade improvement programs.
3. Begin working with community groups, local artists, and the Art in City Life Commission to identify locations for and create murals and public art throughout the Focus Area that represent the character and history of the community.
4. Engage with the property owners of the ALDI commercial plaza area to improve street-facing signage for existing businesses.
5. Install new public trash and recycling receptacles and replace old, deteriorating ones at strategic points to improve the cleanliness of the Focus Area.

Medium-term (2-3 years)

6. Install curb extensions at critical points in the Focus Area to slow traffic and make the environment safer for people walking.
7. Install pedestrian-scaled lighting and banners to improve neighborhood branding and appearance in coordination with the City's Urban Trail Network Signage and Branding project.

Long-term (3+ years)

8. Over time, develop more opportunities for mixed-income housing throughout the Focus Area. Options may include building additional floors above existing buildings.
9. Implement the vision of the Providence Great Streets Master Plan to install a protected bi-directional bike lane along Smith Street after proper vetting from the Smith Hill community.

HARRY KIZIRIAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL FOCUS AREA

Existing Conditions

Harry Kizirian Elementary School is one part of a larger education and resource campus that also includes the Smith Hill Early Childhood Center, the Rogers Recreation Center, and Father Lennon Park, complete with a playground, community garden, and new skate park slated to open in Spring/Summer 2020. The school currently serves over 600 kindergarten through fifth-grade students, of which, 75% speak another language aside from English at home. The schoolyard blacktop serves as the main gathering space before school, during recess, and for after school activity. The schoolyard is beginning to show signs of deterioration and currently lacks amenities for students.

Community Vision

As an important educational and resource hub in tandem with the Smith Hill Early Childhood Center, the Rogers Recreation Center, and Father Lennon Park, improvements to the Harry Kizirian Elementary schoolyard and other on-site facilities should be implemented to provide enough room for additional youth activities.



| Existing conditions of the Harry Kizirian Elementary School Focus Area.

An outdoor classroom area should be created to provide the school with a fun and unique learning space. Attractive ornamental fencing should be installed to replace the rusting chain-link fence. Raised landscape planters and small trees or shrubs should also be installed to soften the space and add much-needed greenery to the hardscape area. The blacktop surface should be repaved with permeable materials and designated areas for play should be painted to help create a more vibrant environment and structured activities to students. Painted murals and artwork should be installed on various surfaces, to celebrate the legacy of

Harry Kizirian, the distinguished Smith Hill native. The Providence Healthy Communities Office recommends a safer connection for students to travel between the schoolyard and Father Lennon Park through the use of murals and other site elements to delineate a walking path.



RAISED
LANDSCAPED
PLANTERS

ADDITIONAL
PAINTED
ACTIVITY AREAS

BASKETBALL
HALF-COURT

BENCHES /
SEATING AREAS

Improvements to the Harry Kizirian Elementary schoolyard in tandem with continued upgrades to Camden Avenue Park and the Rogers Recreation Center to provide additional youth activities.

SMALL TREES
OR SHRUBS

ATTRACTIVE
ORNAMENTAL
FENCING

OUTDOOR
CLASSROOM AREA

NEW BLACKTOP
SURFACE

For illustrative purposes only

Action Steps

Short-term (0-1 year)

1. Work with students, families and faculty to further conceptualize an outdoor classroom space, murals, and other site improvements to Harry Kizirian and Father Lennon Park.
2. Install raised landscape planters and small trees or shrubs in the schoolyard to soften the space and provide much-needed greenery to the hardscape area.
3. Install shade structures in the schoolyard to provide much-needed shade to this area.

Medium-term (2-3 years)

4. Resurface the schoolyard blacktop with permeable surface materials to make it safer, cooler, and more attractive.
5. (Re)paint designated areas for play to make the schoolyard more vibrant and provide structured activities to students.
6. Install benches and other site features to provide additional seating opportunities.
7. As recommended by the Providence Healthy Communities Office, create a safer connection for students to travel between the schoolyard and Father Lennon Park through the use of murals and other site elements to delineate a safe, visible walking path.

Long-term (3+ years)

8. Replace the chain-link fence with attractive ornamental fencing to add more color to the school yard.
9. Install an outdoor classroom space to bring a fun, interactive learning space outside of the typical classroom environment.

SMITH AND CHALKSTONE FOCUS AREA

Existing Conditions

The Smith Street and Chalkstone Avenue intersection is the busiest intersection in Smith Hill. This critical junction is a six-way intersection that converges at multiple points. The site's geometry combined with generous turning radii, tight sidewalks, and long crosswalks, creates a hostile environment for people walking and biking – especially for students walking to and from Harry Kizirian Elementary School a block away. Buildings along this intersection are primarily traditional single-story commercial uses. Commercial buildings include a mixture of modest, turn-of-the-century storefronts, automobile-centric businesses with wide curb cuts and on-site parking, one Mid-century two-story bank, and an 8,000-square foot vacant lot along Camden Avenue.

Community Vision

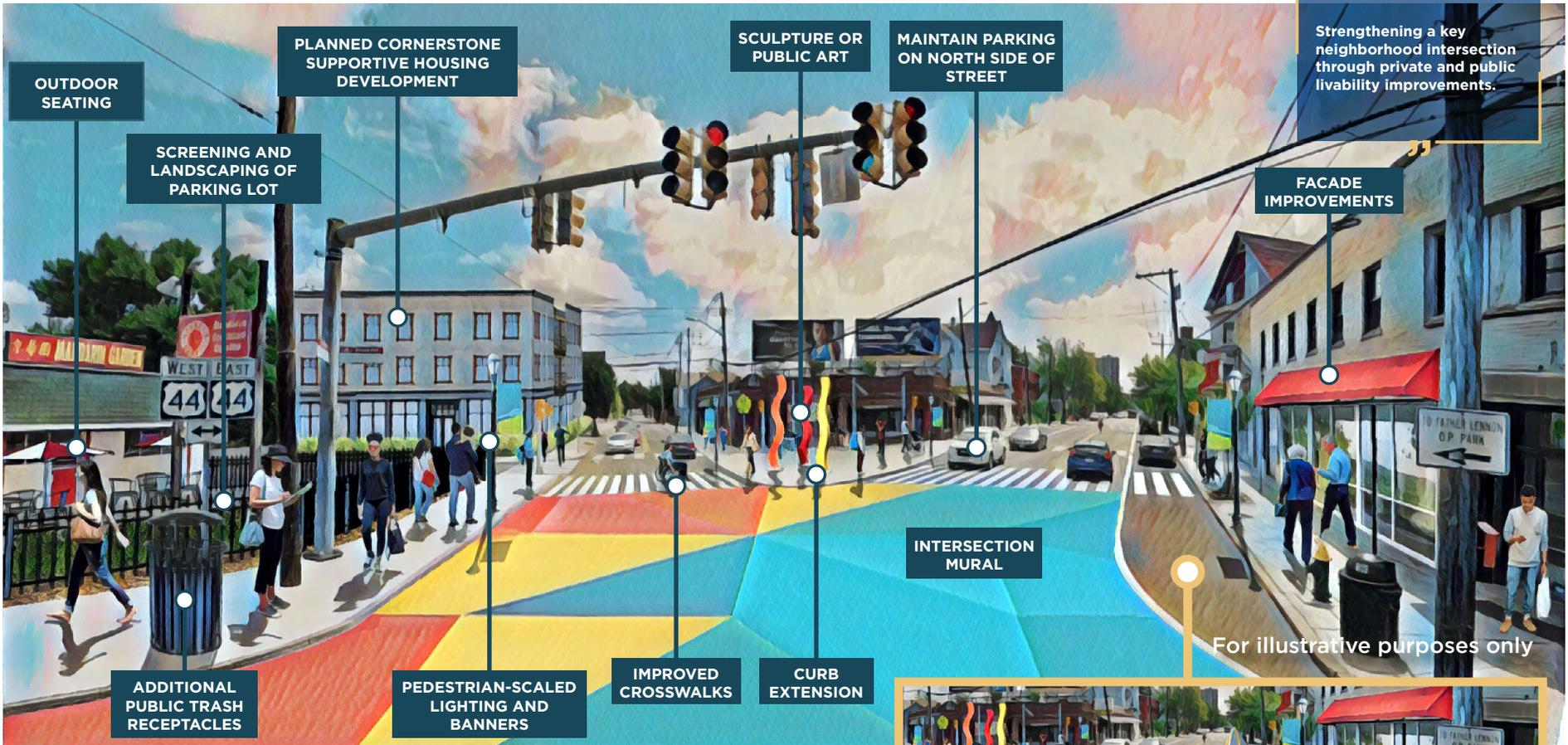
The Smith and Chalkstone Focus Area should be enhanced through a combination of private and public improvements. Incremental but necessary steps should be taken to improve safety for people walking through curb extensions and shortened crosswalks. To improve safety for people riding bicycles and using other



| Existing conditions of the Smith and Chalkstone Focus Area.

micomobility options, a bi-directional, separated bicycle lane should be installed on the southern side of Smith Street as envisioned in the Providence Great Streets Master Plan following a thorough period of community engagement that prioritizes the inclusion of the Smith Hill community into the decision-making process. A large intersection mural could be painted to add vibrancy and encourage drivers to reduce speeds. Sculptures and additional murals throughout the Focus Area should be considered to create a greater sense of place and reflect the history and values of Smith Hill. The Smith Hill CDC's effort to transform the vacant property on Camden Avenue into a supportive housing complex will help improve the overall appearance of the area and add to the neighborhood housing stock.

Sidewalks should be properly buffered from parking lots using appealing landscaping and screening elements to help beautify the area and improve the corridor experience for people walking. Old public trash receptacles should be replaced and upgraded. Additional receptacles should be strategically placed throughout the Focus Area where they're most needed. All trash receptacles should be routinely collected and well maintained to clear streets and sidewalks of litter. Facade improvements should be pursued to make buildings more attractive. Greater emphasis should be placed on outdoor seating to activate the street. More restaurants should be encouraged to open along the corridor to add to the diversity of options in Smith Hill as an international food destination.



The Providence Great Streets Master Plan recommends the installation of a protected bi-directional bike lane along Smith Street.

Action Steps

Short-term (0-1 year)

1. Improve crosswalks to improve visibility and safety for people walking.
2. Identify resources to connect property owners with façade improvement programs.
3. Begin working with community groups and local artists to identify locations for and create murals and public art throughout the Focus Area that represent the character and history of the community.
4. Work with restaurant owners and the City to find ways to allow for more outdoor seating.

Medium-term (2-3 years)

5. Install curb extensions at critical points in the Focus Area to slow traffic and make the environment safer for people walking.
6. Install more pedestrian-scaled fencing, screening and landscape features to create a buffer between sidewalks and parking lots.
7. Paint an intersection mural to add vibrancy and encourage better driving behavior.
8. Install pedestrian-scaled lighting and banners in coordination with the City's Urban Trail Network Signage and Branding project to improve neighborhood branding and appearance.

Long-term (3+ years)

9. Encourage the development of the planned Cornerstone Supportive Housing Development at the intersection of Chalkstone and Camden avenues to bring additional affordable housing opportunities to the community.
10. Implement the vision of the Providence Great Streets Master Plan to install a protected bi-directional bike lane along Smith Street after proper vetting from the Smith Hill community.

SMITH AND ORMS FOCUS AREA

Existing Conditions

The Smith Street and Orms Street intersection is another prominent intersection in the Smith Hill neighborhood. The former Portland Transmission site, directly adjacent to the intersection, includes approximately 42,000-square feet of vacant land that is currently available for purchase. This site is the largest property for sale in the neighborhood and one that is highly visible. Across the street are two public spaces, Boyle Plaza and Joseph P Hassett Sr Memorial Park. The Rhode Island State House creates a prominent focal point from this intersection when looking eastward on Smith Street.

Community Vision

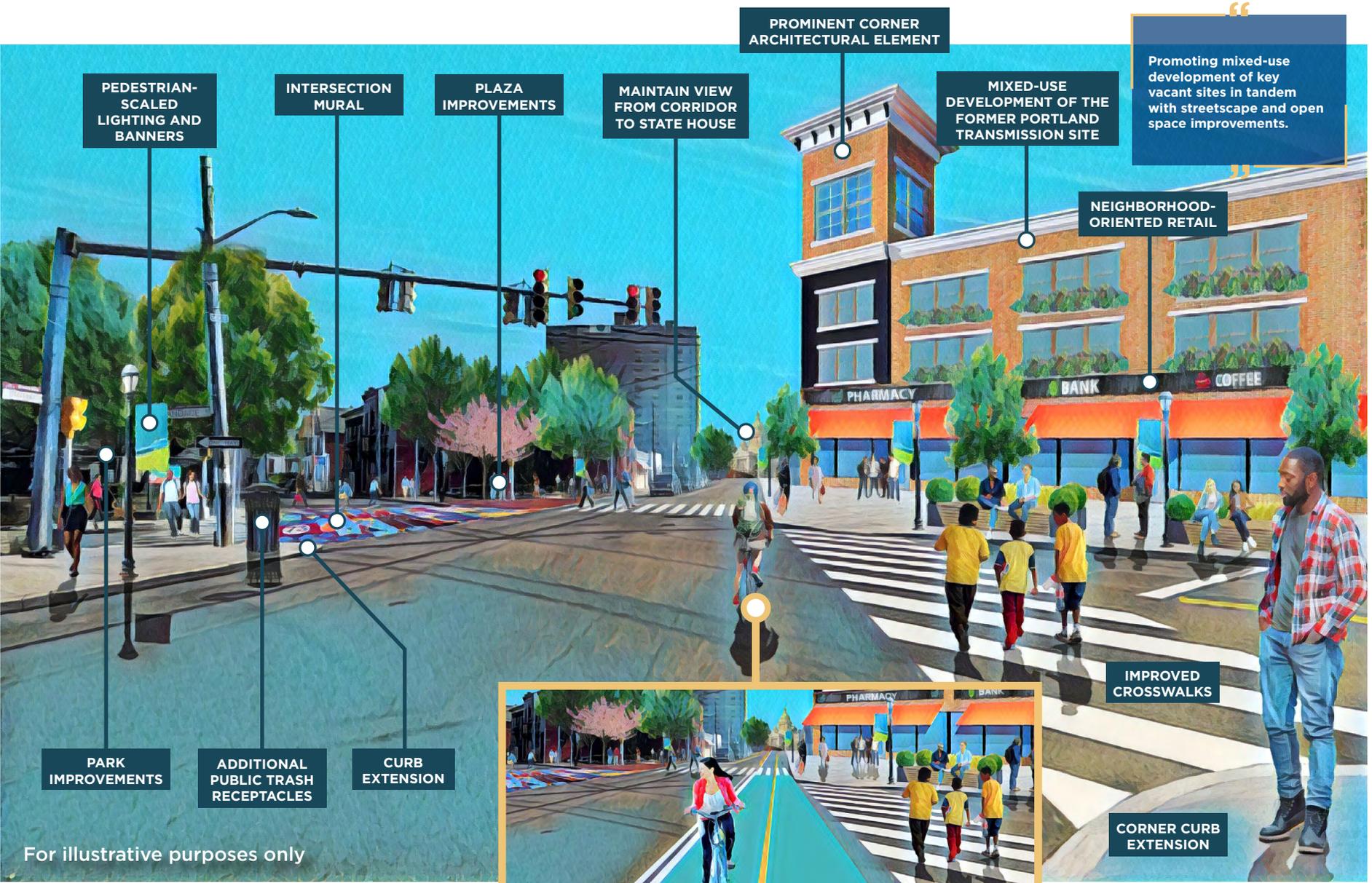
The former Portland Transmission site should be transformed into a pedestrian-oriented mixed-use development that addresses a variety of community needs, from increasing the supply of affordable and mixed-income housing to developing commercial spaces that provide desired services to the community. Several businesses such as a pharmacy, bank, or café should be considered on the ground floor of the new development. Connections between Russell J Boyle Plaza and Joseph P Hassett Sr Memorial Park should be improved



| Existing conditions of the Smith and Orms Focus Area.

through landscaping, outdoor furniture and an intersection mural. Curb extensions should be installed to improve safety for people walking and reduce crosswalk distances. Pedestrian-scaled lighting and banners should be integrated to improve neighborhood branding and appearance. Improved trash collection and the addition and replacement of trash receptacles will improve the cleanliness throughout the Focus Area. Existing trees along public sidewalks should be trimmed and additional trees should be planted around the former Portland Transmission site to help soften the intersection. Following proper vetting from the community, a two-way, separated bike

lane should be installed along the south side of Smith Street as recommended in the Providence Great Streets Master Plan, in addition to working with RIPTA to evaluate bus stop placement, spacing, and amenities. The view of the State House looking eastward should be preserved to contribute to the identity and sense of place along the Smith Street corridor.



For illustrative purposes only



For illustrative purposes only

The Providence Great Streets Master Plan recommends the installation of a protected bi-directional bike lane along Smith Street.

Action Steps

Short-term (0-1 year)

1. Begin engaging with the community to discuss improvements residents would like to see at Boyle Plaza and Joseph P Hassett Sr Memorial Park.
2. Pursue redevelopment opportunities to transform the former Portland Transmission site into a mixed-use development.
3. Improve crosswalks in the intersection to promote visibility and safety for people walking.
4. Begin working with community groups, local artists, and the City's Art in City Life Commission to identify locations for and create murals and public art throughout the Focus Area that represent the character and history of the community.

Medium-term (2-3 years)

5. Install curb extensions at critical points in the Focus Area to slow traffic and improve safety for people walking.
6. Paint an intersection mural near Boyle Plaza and Joseph P Hassett Sr Memorial Park to create a stronger visual connection between the two public spaces and encourage drivers to slow down.
7. Install pedestrian-scaled lighting and banners to improve neighborhood branding and appearance in coordination with the City's Urban Trail Network Signage and Branding project.

Long-term (3+ years)

8. Implement the vision of the Providence Great Streets Master Plan to install a protected bi-directional bike lane along Smith Street after proper vetting from the Smith Hill community.

HIGH PRIORITY PROJECTS





PROJECT RANKING

The following initiatives were identified through the Listening, Learning, and Visioning phases of the planning process, which included conversations with the City, Steering Committee, and community. Together, these projects will help revitalize the Smith Street area while improving the quality of life for residents. Each project includes potential lead and supporting partners, potential resources, and short-, medium- and long-term action steps.

At Steering Committee Meeting 3, members helped rank and prioritize projects based on critical needs, supporting local partners and initiatives, and potential catalytic effects. The following eleven projects are ranked as the highest priorities on the action agenda for revitalization:

- 1 Create a Community Bulletin Board (**Early Action Project**)
- 2 Improve Vacant Properties with Pocket Parks, Plazas, and Community Gardens
- 3 Implement Public Art and Signage Improvements
- 4 Implement Changes to Improve Safety for all Road Users as Identified in the Providence Great Streets Master Plan
- 5 Encourage Mixed-Income Housing Development on Key Sites
- 6 Create a Business Façade Improvement Program
- 7 Install Little Free Libraries Throughout the Neighborhood to Encourage Reading
- 8 Establish a Smith Hill Merchants Association
- 9 Improve Smith Hill Library as a Community Learning Anchor and Include Additional Educational Programming for Youth and Adults
- 10 Improve the Schoolyard at Harry Kizirian Elementary
- 11 Improve the Cleanliness of Smith Street



1. Community Bulletin Board (Early Action Project)

Description

Note: Please refer to page 36 for more information related to the development of the Early Action Project.

The community bulletin board would allow residents to share information, spotlight businesses, promote upcoming events and improve the branding and appearance of the Smith Hill neighborhood. This community bulletin board should be fixed and located near a busy intersection with plenty of people walking by, such as near the intersection of Smith and Orms streets next to Russell J Boyle Plaza or near the intersection of Smith Street and Chalkstone Avenue. Various prototypes of digital community bulletin boards are being installed in urban neighborhoods across the country and could also be considered for Smith Street. A digital community bulletin board can be used to share important information to the neighborhood such as general City

information, transit updates, advertising for local businesses, and employment opportunities. The bulletin board could be developed in tandem with a Little Free Library installation.

Action Steps

1. Identify a location for the community bulletin board that is visible and conveniently located for neighborhood residents and visitors.
2. Work with neighborhood residents and local stakeholders to help develop the design and primary functions of the community bulletin board.
3. Identify potential partners and resources in the development of the community bulletin board that could be formally presented to the City.

Lead Partner

The Smith Street Revitalization Plan Steering Committee and Councilwoman Kerwin: to coordinate and plan the development and ongoing management of the community bulletin board.

Potential Partners

- City of Providence Department of Art, Culture + Tourism
- SHPI
- SHARP
- Smith Hill CDC

Potential Resources

- **\$1,000 in Early Action Funding** as part of the Smith Street Revitalization Plan.
- **Rhode Island Foundation Community Grant:** Provides grants up to \$10,000 for community-making efforts. For 2020, the Foundation is looking for projects that build social networks and connections among neighbors; develop and sustain strong relationships that persist over time; enhance the role of shared public spaces as community anchors; help people collaborate in order to identify goals, solve problems, or make group decisions; and share traditions with community members.
- **Soofa:** A female-founded company launched out of MIT and Harvard in 2014 focused on creating Soofa Signs, a 42" free standing digital bulletin board and news feed.



2. Improve Vacant Properties with Pocket Parks, Plazas, and Community Gardens

Description

Public spaces provide opportunities for recreation and gathering. Connections between public spaces should be improved and new public spaces should be established to fill in gaps and create a cohesive, well-integrated network. Community gardens bring neighbors and stakeholders together to beautify the neighborhood, while providing fresh, healthy and low-cost food for residents. By creating a network of pocket parks and gardens, the Smith Hill neighborhood can become greener, healthier and more sustainable.

Action Steps

The Plan recommends the following steps to create and improve a network of pocket parks:

- 1. Smith Hill Park Improvements:** Through representatives of SHARP and SHPI, the City should engage community members to help identify potential park locations, identify needs for existing open spaces, and relay neighborhood concerns to City of Providence Parks Department staff.
- 2. Open Space Evaluation:** Each potential pocket park, plaza or community garden should be evaluated for physical improvement needs including the installation of decorative fencing, landscaping and signage.
- 3. Placemaking:** Placemaking techniques should be used to improve Smith Hill's existing parks and plazas. Placemaking is an approach that is applied to the planning, design and management of public spaces, helping residents and stakeholders reimagine and reinvent the public spaces that define their community. The collaborative process strengthens the bond between people and the places they share. Placemaking encourages creative treatments of space in ways that reflect a community's physical, cultural, and social identity. Good placemaking makes use of underutilized space to enhance the community. The Plan recommends that the City use existing funding sources such as the City's Community Development Block Grant program (CDBG) and Capital Improvement Program (CIP) to create pocket parks within Smith Hill.

The Plan recommends the following steps to establish a Smith Hill Community Gardens Initiative:

- 1. Identify Vacant Lots:** Where community support is available, vacant lots should be identified as future community garden sites. These properties offer an opportunity to initiate community garden programs as an interim or long-term use of underutilized property. The establishment of community gardens brings neighbors and stakeholders together to beautify the neighborhood while providing fresh, healthy and low-cost food for residents. The City should work with property owners to assess the availability of potential community garden sites and promote the initiative with local partners.
- 2. Garden Program:** Begin a community garden program on the most prominent vacant lots within the neighborhood.
- 3. Fresh Food Initiative:** Develop partnerships to provide fresh food to local residents. This can be done through relationships with local businesses and organizations, or through the establishment of a farm stand on Smith Street.

Lead Partner

Southside Community Land Trust (SCLT):

SCLT serves people in economically challenged urban neighborhoods where fresh produce is scarce and who, as a result, are at risk for life-threatening, diet-related, chronic diseases.

Potential Partners

- Faith-based Organizations
- Office of Sustainability
- Providence Healthy Communities Office
- City of Providence Parks Department

Potential Resources

- **City of Providence Neighborhood Improvement Funds (NIF)** - The NIF includes neighborhood infrastructure dollars available through the City's general fund and allocated by the City Council. These funds can be used for a variety of infrastructure needs in their respective wards, including community centers, playgrounds, schools, road paving, traffic calming, and sidewalk repairs.
- **National Association of Realtors (NAR) - Placemaking Micro-Grant:** NAR's Placemaking Grant is available to REALTOR® associations to help them plan, organize, implement and maintain these types of Placemaking activities in their communities.



| Vacant parcels near 320 Orms Street.

- **National Endowment for the Arts - Our Town Grant:** Our Town is the National Endowment for the Arts' creative placemaking grants program. These grants support projects that integrate arts, culture, and design activities into efforts that strengthen communities by advancing local economic, physical, and/or social outcomes.
- **Rhode Island Foundation Community Grant:** Provides grants up to \$10,000 for community-making efforts. For 2020, the Foundation is looking for projects that build social networks and connections among neighbors; develop and sustain strong relationships that persist over time; enhance the role of shared public spaces as community anchors; help people collaborate in order to identify goals, solve problems, or make group decisions; and share traditions with community members.
- **Community Development Block Grant (CDBG):** The primary goal of the CDBG program is the development of viable urban communities through improved living environments, expansion of economic opportunity, and provision and preservation of decent, affordable housing. Funds are intended to serve low-and moderate-income residents and neighborhoods.
- **Capital Improvement Program (CIP):** The City's Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) is a five-year program of planned improvements to Providence's public infrastructure.



3. Implement Public Art and Signage Improvements

Description

Integrate the neighborhood's international community and history into the citywide Urban Trail Network signage program to celebrate the legacy of Smith Hill and highlight the geography, industry, and cultural diversity that gives the community its unique character and sense of place. The citywide Urban Trail signage program will provide a unifying template for banners, directional signs, and interpretive signs that can be tailored to tell the story of each neighborhood's history and culture. The City should also create opportunities for local artists to create public art at key gateway sites including the intersections of Smith Street with I-95, Holden Street, Orms Street, Chalkstone Avenue, and Oakland Avenue. Special attention and resources should be devoted to the I-95 overpass since it is the most prominent gateway to Smith Hill.

Action Steps

Before the installation of new signage and gateways can occur, a neighborhood branding process should be conducted utilizing the following steps, as recommended by the Center for Community Progress:

- 1. Define the Goal:** The project leaders must define what the community wants the branding campaign to accomplish and identify the desired outcomes that would prove the marketing strategy to be successful. In the case of Smith Street, a primary goal might be to provide a positive first impression to the general public. This could be measured through the number of positive media stories featuring the Smith Hill neighborhood.
- 2. Identify Target Markets:** It is critical to decide on exactly who the campaign needs to speak to in order to accomplish the marketing goals. For Smith Street, it will be important to target visitors from nearby areas, including Providence College and the State House, and from those traveling into the neighborhood from outside Providence in order to promote the neighborhood's business, residential and community offerings.
- 3. Select Core Brand Components:** The project leaders should define the first three ideas or emotions they want target markets to think or feel when they hear "Smith Street." By keeping the brand objectives simple and focused, it will be easy to promote the brand with consistency through various marketing strategies. A strong brand will eventually crowd out negative perceptions people may have of the Smith Hill neighborhood. These core messages will be the neighborhood's brand. The Smith Street Vision identified in the Executive Summary section can be a starting point for identifying the neighborhood brand. Feedback from Community Meeting 1 can also be utilized to begin crafting a set of core messages. Some of the most repeated words include Clean, Community, Diverse, Beauty, and Green.
- 4. Develop a Logo:** Work with a graphic designer to create a logo for Smith Street that conveys in images or words the three core components discussed previously. Once designed, it will be important to integrate the logo in as many places as possible, including the neighborhood newsletter, website, house flags, house window decals, yard signs, gateway signage and streetscape banners.
- 5. Align Local Activities:** Consistency is important in the neighborhood branding strategy. Since the desired brand includes having the neighborhood be known for its diversity, other strategies such as the Taste of Smith Hill Festival can help build on the neighborhood brand. Public art installations could also be incorporated into the overall branding effort.

6. Promote Positive Stories: Promote the positive stories, activities and progress taking place in Smith Hill in order to reinforce the desired brand image. Promotion could include online and social media posts, connecting with traditional radio and television media outlets and newspaper stories highlighting local revitalization activities

7. Public Art Installations: The Plan recommends that the City's ACT Public Art program be expanded into the Smith Street Corridor to celebrate the legacy of Smith Hill, highlighting the geography, history, and cultural diversity that gives the community its unique character and sense of place. This public art initiative will improve the visual landscape of Smith Street while creating opportunities for the neighborhood's artistic community. By bringing art into areas experiencing symptoms of disinvestment, the ACT program can bring a sense of identity that not only generates pride in the neighborhood but also creates a destination for visitors.

+ Adapted from "Marketing the Neighborhood," Center for Community Progress (www.communityprogress.net/tool-3--marketing-the-neighborhood-pages-278.php)



| Entering Smith Hill from the Rhode Island State House Grounds.

Lead Partner

City of Providence Department of Planning and Development: Initiate a branding effort with local stakeholders that can translate directly into public art and signage improvements for the corridor.

Potential Partners

- City of Providence Department of Art, Culture + Tourism
- Smith Hill CDC
- Our Streets Providence
- RI Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission
- SHARP

- SHPI
- Providence Preservation Society

Potential Resources

- **City of Providence Neighborhood Improvement Funds (NIF):** NIF funds are neighborhood infrastructure dollars available through the City's general fund and allocated by the City Council. These funds can be used for a variety of infrastructure needs in their respective wards, including (but not limited to) community centers, playgrounds, schools, road paving, traffic calming and safety, and sidewalk repairs.

- **The Main Street Rhode Island Streetscape Improvement Fund:** The Fund awards grants or loans on a competitive basis for improvements to our commercial districts, such as enhanced sidewalks, new street furniture, new way-finding signage, upgraded building facades, and improved street lighting. Projects can receive up to \$300,000 in funding. Applicants must have matching funds of at least 30% of the total project cost.
- **ACT Public Art initiative of the City of Providence Department of Art, Culture + Tourism:** ACT Public Art channels the creative energy of the city manifesting it in a range of artwork and artists' projects that: contribute to shaping the City's visual identity, improve the quality of life for all residents, and create opportunities for engagement, connectivity and community building. The program has four trajectories: Landmark Artworks, Public Art Residencies, Temporary Projects, and Civic Infrastructure.
- **Rhode Island Foundations Expansion Arts Grant:** Rhode Island Expansion Arts Program (RIEAP) offers funding and organizational assistance to community-based, culturally diverse arts and cultural organizations.
- **Rhode Island Foundation Community Grant:** Provides grants up to \$10,000 for community-making efforts. For 2020, the Foundation is looking for projects that

build social networks and connections among neighbors; develop and sustain strong relationships that persist over time; enhance the role of shared public spaces as community anchors; help people collaborate in order to identify goals, solve problems, or make group decisions; and share traditions with community members.

- **Rhode Island State Council on the Arts - Arts Access Grant:** The Arts Access Grant (AAG) program provides program support (maximum of \$3,000) to new ventures or occasional arts programs executed by non-profit organizations, or groups fiscally sponsored by a non-profit organization. Eligible programs should contribute to the vitality of our communities, the economy of our state, the arts education of Rhode Islanders, and our quality of life. Programs must demonstrate excellent artistic, educational, and cultural value, as well as engagement with and relevance to their community.
- **Capital Improvement Program (CIP):** The City's Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) is a five-year program of planned improvements to Providence's public infrastructure.
- **Community Development Block Grant (CDBG):** The primary goal of the CDBG program is the development of viable urban communities through improved living environments, expansion of

economic opportunity, and provision and preservation of decent, affordable housing. Funds are intended to serve low-and moderate-income residents and neighborhoods.

- **Providence Streets Coalition Fund to Promote Safe Streets and Urban Walkability During the Era of Social Distancing:** The Coalition will award micro-grants ranging from \$500 to \$3,000 for proposals that build excitement, momentum, and grassroots support for safer and healthier streets, expanded public space, and more transportation choices in our local communities. Applications are likely to range from projects that help install creative signage to reinforce COVID-era queuing etiquette at bus stops, markets, and takeout locations; to the design and installation of aesthetic and durable barricades and signage to help local restaurants create and designate outdoor dining. Others may include temporary art installations along streets that have been designated as future urban trails as a part of the City's Great Streets Initiative or funding that supports the creation of socially-distanced walking and biking tours of the City's neighborhoods.



4. Implement Changes to Improve Safety for all Road Users as Identified in the Providence Great Streets Master Plan

Description

Work with the Rhode Island Department of Transportation (RIDOT) to implement an Urban Trail along Smith Street to connect to the citywide Urban Trail Network and enhance east-west connectivity through Downtown, Smith Hill, and Elmhurst. Work with RIDOT to implement safety improvements at the intersections of Smith Street with Holden Street, Orms Street, Chalkstone Avenue, and Oakland Avenue. Implement an Urban Trail along the Oakland/Pleasant Valley/Dean Street corridor to connect to the Woonasquatucket River Greenway and enhance north-south connectivity. Investigate concerns regarding speeding and cut-through traffic on Oakland

Avenue, Richter Street, Frederick Street, Ruggles Street, Young Avenue, Camden Street, Candace Street, Goddard Street, Wayne Street, Nolan Street, Ruggles Street, Osborn Street, Pekin Street, and Jefferson Street.

Action Steps

The Plan recommends following the implementation guidance of the Providence Great Streets Master Plan to invest in and preserve great streets, prioritize safety and comfort for people who walk, ride bicycles, and use public transit, advocate for friendlier state laws and policies related to mobility and expand opportunities for engagement, education, and encouragement.

Lead Partner

City of Providence Department of Planning and Development: Design and oversee implementation of the recommendations in the Providence Great Streets Master Plan related to Smith Hill.

Potential Partners

- City of Providence Department of Public Works
- City of Providence Department of Art, Culture + Tourism
- RIDOT
- Rhode Island Public Transit Authority
- Our Streets Providence

- SHARP
- SHPI

Potential Resources

- **City of Providence Neighborhood Improvement Funds (NIF):** NIF funds are neighborhood infrastructure dollars available through the City's general fund and allocated by the City Council. These funds can be used for a variety of infrastructure needs in their respective wards, including (but not limited to) community centers, playgrounds, schools, road paving, traffic calming and safety, and sidewalk repairs.
- **City of Providence Sidewalk Repair Program:** The City of Providence has a draft Sidewalk Repair Policy, which guides how the City plans, executes and maintains sidewalk repairs. This policy considers factors such as ADA compliance, sidewalk condition, available funding, adjacent and nearby uses, volume of people walking, and existence of legal claims.
- **City of Providence Traffic Calming Program:** The City's current traffic calming program focuses on residential street improvements to slow traffic based on project priorities screened and advanced through an established process.

- Capital Improvement Program (CIP):** The City's Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) is a five-year program of planned improvements to Providence's public infrastructure.
- Community Development Block Grant (CDBG):** The primary goal of the CDBG program is the development of viable urban communities through improved living environments, expansion of economic opportunity, and provision and preservation of decent, affordable housing. Funds are intended to serve low-and moderate-income residents and neighborhoods.
- Private, Community, and Non-Profit Developments:** Proposed development projects that come before the City for approval may identify needed improvements to street and sidewalk infrastructure. These projects sometimes include mitigation funds to pay for these or other improvements.
- Providence Streets Coalition Fund to Promote Safe Streets and Urban Walkability During the Era of Social Distancing:** The Coalition will award micro-grants ranging from \$500 to \$3,000 in the Spring and Summer of 2020 for proposals that build excitement, momentum, and grassroots support for safer and healthier streets, expanded public space, and more transportation choices in our local communities. Applications are likely to range from

Project List

Street or Trail Name	From	To	Project Type	Why is this important?	Recommendation	Implementation Action
Dean	Atwells	Valley	Urban Trail	Connects across key gap in pedestrian, bicycle, and micromobility access between Federal Hill, Valley, and Smith Hill	Two-Way Urban Trail with Accessible Sidewalk	Move curbs
Dean/Raymond/Oakland/Davis Park Path	Valley	Smith	Urban Trail	Connects school and major neighborhood park and fills network gap between the Woonasquattucket River and Smith Street	Two-Way Shared Use Path	Move curbs, Enhance quality of existing facility
Woonasquattucket River Greenway Extension	Eagle	Park	Urban Trail	Project in design that extends Woonasquattucket River Greenway into Downtown	Two-Way Shared Use Path	Remove travel lane (Road Diet)
Smith	Oakland	Orms	Urban Trail	Completes Smith Hill connection from Oakland to College Hill; enhancing access to schools, parks, downtown, and other destinations	Two-Way Urban Trail with Accessible Sidewalk	Consolidate parking one side
Smith	Orms	Park	Urban Trail	Extends proposed Smith Urban Trail by State Capitol west to Smith Hill neighborhood; enhances access to park	Two-Way Urban Trail with Accessible Sidewalk	Remove parking one side, Narrow travel or parking lane (Lane Diet)
Smith	Park	Canal	Urban Trail	Provides connectivity through State Capitol area to new Urban Trail on Canal St.	Two-Way Urban Trail with Accessible Sidewalk	Remove travel lane (Road Diet)
Charles/Mill/Canal	Ashburton/Randall	Smith	Urban Trail	Connects to new Canal Urban Trail and proposed W. River St. Urban Trail; moves toward better access to Downtown from Charles and Mount Hope	Two-Way Urban Trail with Accessible Sidewalk	Remove travel lane (Road Diet), Move curbs
Oakland	Smith	Eaton	Urban Trail	North-south connection between neighborhoods; enhances access to Providence College, Davis Park, and schools; extends proposed Dean/PVP Urban Trail north	Neighborhood Greenway	Neighborhood Greenway Toolbox (Speed management, major intersections, wayfinding)
Douglas	Orms	Eaton	Urban Trail	Enhances access to parks, schools, and Providence College	Two-Way Urban Trail with Accessible Sidewalk	Consolidate parking one side

Project List recommendations for Smith Hill (Source: Providence Great Streets Master Plan).

projects that help install creative signage to reinforce COVID-era queuing etiquette at bus stops, markets, and takeout locations; to the design and installation of aesthetic and durable barricades and signage to help local restaurants create and designate outdoor dining. Others may include temporary art installations along streets that have been designated as future urban trails as a part of the City's Great Streets Initiative or funding that supports the creation of socially-distanced walking and biking tours of the City's neighborhoods.



5. Encourage Mixed-Income Housing Development on Key Sites

Description

Based on the Market Study conducted as part of this planning process (see Appendix for more detail), it is clear that demand for both rental and for sale residential properties outstrips supply, resulting in steep increases in sales prices and rents over the past several years. Potential development sites such as the 3.2-acre site near Holden and Orms streets and the former Portland Transmission site at Smith and Orms streets should be prioritized for residential development or purpose-built student housing which could help ease the shortage of housing units for working families in the neighborhood. Just north of the planning area, the Chad Brown public housing site, owned and managed by the Providence Housing Authority, could provide an opportunity for a larger mixed-income redevelopment that could have a significant impact on Smith Hill.

Action Steps

1. Before development occurs, create a plan for short-term placemaking improvements to help beautify and activate vacant properties.
2. Work with partners such as the Smith Hill CDC to facilitate redevelopment of the former Portland Transmission Site in a way that aligns with the community needs and vision for the site as a pedestrian-oriented, multi-story mixed-use building, including mixed-income housing, that could catalyze additional neighborhood reinvestment.
3. Continue to identify and work with property owners with sites suitable for potential mixed-income development.
4. Encourage smaller infill developments, including mixed-income housing, within the Smith Street Corridor. The development of single-use sites into mixed-use can provide additional mixed-income housing units that are desired by local residents. Adding housing to the Smith Street corridor can also help to support small local businesses.
5. Work with the Providence Housing Authority to explore alternatives for mixed-income redevelopment or rehabilitation of the Chad Brown property. It is recommended that

the Providence Housing Authority consider applying for a HUD Choice Neighborhoods Planning / Action Grant in order to develop a vision and strategies for this property in context with surrounding neighborhood improvements. The Choice Neighborhoods program leverages significant public and private dollars to support locally driven strategies that address struggling neighborhoods with distressed public or HUD-assisted housing through a comprehensive approach to neighborhood transformation.

Lead Partner

Smith Hill Community Development Corporation (CDC): Smith Hill CDC is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to providing safe, affordable housing.

Potential Partners

- Providence Housing Authority
- Rhode Island Housing
- City of Providence Department of Planning and Development

Potential Resources

- **Equitable Neighborhood Development Planning Grant:** National Association for Latino Community Asset Builders: Technical assistance, and training to develop and implement data- and community-driven action plans for equitable development.
- **Community Development Block Grant (CDBG):** The primary goal of the CDBG program is the development of viable urban communities through improved living environments, expansion of economic opportunity, and provision and preservation of decent, affordable housing. Funds are intended to serve low-and moderate-income residents and neighborhoods.
- **HOME Investment Partnerships Program (HOME):** The HOME program is dedicated to increasing the availability, as well as the access to, affordable housing for low-income households.
- **Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC):** The Low-Income Housing Tax Credit subsidizes the acquisition, construction, and rehabilitation of affordable rental housing for low- and moderate-income tenants. The LIHTC was enacted as part of the 1986 Tax Reform Act and has been modified numerous times.
- **Choice Neighborhoods Planning Grant:** Choice Neighborhoods Planning Grants support the development



The former Portland Transmission site at the southeast corner of Smith and Orms Streets provides the opportunity for new mixed-use development.

of comprehensive neighborhood revitalization plans which focus on directing resources to address three core goals: Housing, People and Neighborhoods.

- **Choice Neighborhood Implementation Grant:** Choice Neighborhoods Implementation Grants support those communities that have undergone a comprehensive local planning process and are ready to implement their “Transformation Plan” to redevelop the neighborhood.



6. Create a Business Façade Improvement Program

Description

A facade improvement program should be created to encourage and assist commercial property owners and tenants in making exterior building facade improvements and installing new signage. Facade improvements for commercial properties on Smith Street could be tied directly to the City’s Great Streets Initiative to enhance the interface between the public realm and commercial activities. The improved appearance of commercial buildings will generate a positive aesthetic impact on the neighborhood. The City and/or local partners should explore funding opportunities to offer grants and workshops to assist with exterior renovations of existing commercial properties.

Action Steps

1. Identify all potential storefronts within the Smith Street Corridor.

2. Develop a “kit of parts” for improvement projects. Examples include identifying specific materials, architectural elements, and awning types for facades to utilize.
3. Hold “Pop-up” events in vacant storefronts to create momentum for the improvement and activation of underutilized spaces.
4. Where possible, use historic photos and resources to show potential of storefronts that could be restored to their original architectural quality.
5. Establish a small grant program to assist business owners in improvements. The Plan recommends that the program be based on the following general structure:

SUGGESTED FUNDING STRUCTURE

Approved projects would be eligible for reimbursement of up to 50 percent of project costs for eligible project elements (i.e. upgrades or alterations to building exteriors), up to \$10,000. Funding would be provided on a competitive basis.

SUGGESTED REQUIREMENTS

Property must be located within the Smith Street Revitalization Plan boundary. Property must contain an active commercial business or be undergoing renovations for the opening of a business within six months. Applicants must be current on City of Providence taxes and must not owe other City fees prior to filing an application.

Program would include the installation of a new façade or major enhancements to an existing façade. Business owners leasing space can apply with written permission from the property owner; Property should not be targeted for redevelopment. General maintenance and upkeep of existing exterior are NOT included in this program.

Lead Partner

Smith Hill CDC: To work directly with the City of Providence Department of Planning and Development to begin to structure a program based on initial recommendations outlined in the Plan.

Potential Partners

- City of Providence Department of Planning and Development
- City of Providence Office of Economic Opportunity

Potential Resources

- **Community Development Block Grant (CDBG):** The primary goal of the CDBG program is the development of viable urban communities through improved living environments, expansion of economic opportunity, and provision and preservation of decent, affordable housing. Funds are intended to serve low-and moderate-income residents and neighborhoods.



7. Install Little Free Libraries Throughout the Neighborhood to Encourage Reading

Description

One of the most successful ways to improve children's reading achievement is to increase their access to books, especially at home. Two out of three children living in poverty have no books to call their own (**Source: LittleFreeLibrary.org**). In order to bring additional opportunities for reading to residents, it is recommended that a free library program be integrated at key locations within the neighborhood.

Action Steps

- 1. Build Interest and Find Partners:** Find community members who want to strengthen the neighborhood and improve access to books by creating and maintaining their own small libraries in front of houses or in neighborhood parks. Find partners willing to donate building supplies or books, and/or help with a group build day.
- 2. Organize a Group Build Day:** There are several library kits available in The Insider's Guide to Starting a Little Free Library's online store that come with step-by-step instructions and can be assembled in as little as two hours.
- 3. Announce Your Library through Local and Social Media:** Promote the finished libraries on social media and in neighborhood newsletters to encourage community members to use them.

Lead Partner

Smith Hill CDC: To identify potential locations within the Smith Hill neighborhood, and organize potential partners for implementation.

Potential Partners

- Providence Community Library
- City of Providence Department of Art, Culture + Tourism
- Providence Public School District

Potential Resources

- **Rhode Island Foundation Library Challenge Grant:** Intended to provide additional funding for campaigns planned to meet local needs; i.e., annual fundraising drives or special campaigns directed toward the acquisition of equipment, special collections, or more books, publications, and holdings in other media.
- **Rhode Island Foundation Community Grant:** Provides grants up to \$10,000 for community-making efforts. For 2020, the Foundation is looking for projects that build social networks and connections among neighbors; develop and sustain strong relationships that persist over time; enhance the role of shared public spaces as community anchors; help people collaborate in order to identify goals, solve problems, or make group decisions; and share traditions with community members.



8. Establish a Smith Hill Merchants Association

Description

Connecting and organizing the local business community will help existing businesses grow locally, improve marketing strategies, expand into new markets, and remain competitive in an increasingly complex and evolving marketplace. The merchants association should also work with entrepreneurs and start-ups to assist them in creating and running a successful business in the neighborhood. A Merchants Association could help business owners overcome challenges they are unable to address on their own. Working in partnership with local business owners, the association could help achieve a business climate that fosters entrepreneurship, produces opportunities for living-wage jobs, advocates for flexible regulations, and supports restaurants, shops, and services that enhance the lives of residents. The Merchants Association could also pull resources together to assist with corridor-wide cleaning efforts and ensure greater accountability for businesses to remove litter near their property.

Action Steps

The steps to creating a strategic plan for the establishment of a business or merchants association, as recommended by the Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE), include:

- 1. Research existing merchants associations:** Several successful merchants associations currently operate within the City of Providence. These include the Wayland Square Merchants Association, the Hope Street Merchants Association, the Thayer Street District Management Authority, and the Wickenden Area Merchants Association.
- 2. Hold a business owners roundtable:** Independent and family-owned establishments have a strong presence in Smith Street's business community. To learn more about how and why these companies are drawn to Smith Hill, the Plan recommends holding a business owner roundtable to offer local business owners an opportunity to discuss the challenges they face and discover new ways to grow.
- 3. Define the target audience:** It is important to determine whether the merchants association should represent every type, size and form of business in Smith Hill, or represent a specific segment of the local business community. Defining this audience will help focus recruitment efforts and

establish a clear purpose within the business community.

- 4. Identify membership needs:** Business owners will join the association if they recognize a tangible benefit to their businesses. Therefore, it is critical for the association to understand the issues that are important to members and potential members. Identification of needs should be an ongoing process in order to stay relevant and successful as an association. Defining programs and benefits is the bridge between what members need and how the association delivers benefits to them. Association services and activities should include networking, education, advocacy, promotion and training.
- 5. Determine costs and revenue sources:** Once a program of services is developed, it is important to understand what it will take to deliver those services in a professional and reliable manner. Through this process, sources of revenue can also be identified. The greater the sources of revenue, the greater the quantity and quality of services that can be provided for members.

6. Identify Opportunities: The Plan recommends the utilization of multiple sources of data to identify gaps in the business community, including feedback from the business owners roundtable, market feasibility studies and neighborhood surveys.

7. Business Improvement District: Consider establishing the merchants association as a business improvement district for greater management and maintenance of Smith Street. The Thayer Street District Management Authority is a local example of a business improvement district.

+ Adapted from “Business Associations for the 21st Century,” Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE) (www.cipe.org/vba/business-associations-guidebook)

Lead Partner

Smith Hill CDC: to convene existing businesses for discussions relating to organizing and forming a merchants association.

Potential Partners

- RI Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
- Rhode Island Black Business Association
- City of Providence Office of Economic Opportunity

- Greater Providence Chamber of Commerce
- U.S. Small Business Administration

Potential Resources

- **Rhode Island Foundation Organizational Development Grant:** Organizational Development Grants can be used to fund activities that strengthen and improve organizational efficiency and effectiveness. This may include strategic planning, business planning, feasibility studies, fund development planning, marketing and communications planning, planning for reorganization, streamlining, and/or mergers, financial management planning or systems adoption, and transition or succession planning.
- **Rhode Island Foundation Community Grant:** Provides grants up to \$10,000 for community-making efforts. For 2020, the Foundation is looking for projects that build social networks and connections among neighbors; develop and sustain strong relationships that persist over time; enhance the role of shared public spaces as community anchors; help people collaborate in order to identify goals, solve problems, or make group decisions; and share traditions with community members.
- **Rhode Island Foundation Juanita Sánchez Community Fund Grant:** The fund provides support for Rhode Island's Latino community by offering grant assistance to nonprofit organizations working for the betterment of the Latino community in the state.
- **Rhode Island Foundation Responsive Grant:** Responsive Grants are awarded to respond to the expressed needs of the community. Nonprofit organizations that are interested in applying should be addressing urgent community needs, emerging opportunities, testing new ideas, or supporting proven programs.



9. Improve Smith Hill Library as a Community Learning Anchor and Include Additional Educational Programming for Youth and Adults

Description

The Smith Hill Library is an important neighborhood center, offering meeting space and classes relating to language development and school readiness. It is recommended that the Library continue to be leveraged as a more robust learning hub, through agreements with local colleges and other partners. In particular, residents have identified the need for additional programming focused on adult learning.

Action Steps

1. Assess existing programs and how they meet the needs of the community.

2. Evaluate the gaps in programming and begin to identify partners that would be willing to provide additional services.
3. Work with the Providence Community Library to potentially extend open hours for the Smith Hill Library. If Library hours are unable to be extended, develop a method for the lower portion of the Library to be accessible and available to community groups and organizations on an appointment basis.
4. Continue to recruit local volunteers to help provide additional programming, fundraising and library assistance efforts.
5. In order to provide long-term space for additional programs, the Plan recommends that the Smith Hill Library evaluate their spatial needs and examine their potential for physical expansion. Potential expansion areas could include the grassy lawns on the northeast corner of the site.

Lead Partner

Providence Community Library: to evaluate their overall needs and capacity and to continue to advocate for additional resources for programs and physical improvements.

Potential Partners

- Providence Public Schools
- University and College Partners

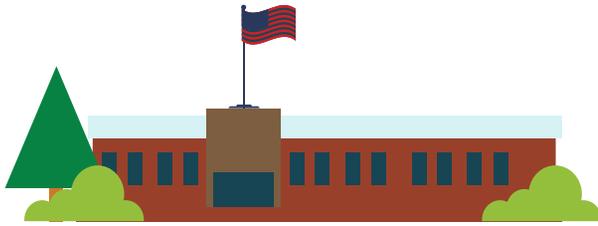
Potential Resources

- **State Grant-in-Aid:** The State of Rhode Island provides financial support to libraries in accordance with Rhode Island General Law 29-6. State library aid is administered by the Office of Library and Information Services and is available in the categories of: Public Library Grant-in-Aid, Public Library Construction Reimbursement, and Institutional Library Grant-in-Aid.
- **City of Providence Neighborhood Improvement Funds (NIF):** NIF funds are neighborhood infrastructure dollars available through the City's general fund and allocated by the City Council. These funds can be used for a variety of infrastructure needs in their respective wards, including (but not limited to) community centers, playgrounds, schools, road paving, traffic calming and safety, and sidewalk repairs.
- **Rhode Island Foundation Library Challenge Grant:** Intended to provide added funding for campaigns planned to meet local needs; i.e., annual fundraising drives or special campaigns directed toward the acquisition of equipment, special collections, or more books, publications, and holdings in other media.

- **Rhode Island Foundation Providence Journal Charitable Legacy Fund Grant:** The Fund supports qualified nonprofit organizations that provide programs and services in the areas of human services and healthcare, with a focus on the homeless, education and youth, arts and culture, and responsible and ethical journalism.
- **Starbucks Foundation Grants:** The Foundation funds programs for youth, ages 6-18, that integrate literacy with personal and civic action in the communities where they live. The Starbucks Foundation invites letters of inquiry from qualifying 501 (c) 3 organizations that work with underserved youth in the fields of literacy (reading, writing and creative/media arts) and environmental literacy. Grants range from \$5,000-\$20,000.



| The Smith Hill Library located at 31 Candace St.



10. Improve the Schoolyard at Harry Kizirian Elementary

Description

The mission of Harry Kizirian Elementary is to strive to educate students and to assist them in realizing their full potential as responsible, productive, contributing members of society by providing an educational environment in which students are challenged, excellence is expected and differences are valued. In support of this mission, the Plan recommends improving the hardscape schoolyard to support a variety of new activities through the establishment of an outdoor classroom along with redesigned spaces to accommodate basketball and other games. Improved landscaping and a redesign of the fence between the swimming pool and the schoolyard will help to create a more pleasing environment as well as a stronger connection between the school, Rogers Recreation Center, and Father Lennon Park.

Action Steps

1. Secure funding for a design team.
2. Hire a design team to create a plan for the schoolyard area. Utilize the Green Schoolyards Design Guide, developed through the City of Providence Parks Department and Healthy Communities Office, as a tool for improvement. The Design Guide includes prototypical site plans for small, medium and large-scale schoolyards, as well as design details and cost estimates for materials, landscape, play equipment, shade structures, educational elements, and garden features.
3. Secure funding for construction of the schoolyard improvements.

Lead Partner

Providence Public Schools: to initiate a conceptual design for the schoolyard and to organize parents who may be interested in leading fundraising efforts.

Potential Partners

- Harry Kizirian Elementary Staff
- Harry Kizirian Elementary PTO
- Rhode Island Department of Education
- City of Providence Parks Department
- Youth in Action
- Groundwork Rhode Island
- Providence Healthy Communities Office

Potential Resources

- **City of Providence Neighborhood Improvement Funds (NIF):** NIF funds are neighborhood infrastructure dollars available through the City's general fund and allocated by the City Council. These funds can be used for a variety of infrastructure needs in their respective wards, including (but not limited to) community centers, playgrounds, schools, road paving, traffic calming and safety, and sidewalk repairs.
- **Community Development Block Grant (CDBG):** The primary goal of the CDBG program is the development of viable urban communities through improved living environments, expansion of economic opportunity, and provision and preservation of decent, affordable housing. Funds are intended to serve low-and moderate-income residents and neighborhoods.
- **Rhode Island Foundation Arts in Academics Grant:** The Arts in Academics Fund supports educational projects that integrate art disciplines into other core academic subjects. Successful Arts in Academics projects create collaborations among artists and educators and promote the arts as an integral part of the learning process.

- **Rhode Island Foundation Community Grant:** Provides grants up to \$10,000 for community-making efforts. For 2020, the Foundation is looking for projects that build social networks and connections among neighbors; develop and sustain strong relationships that persist over time; enhance the role of shared public spaces as community anchors; help people collaborate in order to identify goals, solve problems, or make group decisions; and share traditions with community members.
- **Rhode Island Foundation Providence Journal Charitable Legacy Fund Grant:** The Fund supports qualified nonprofit organizations that provide programs and services in the areas of human services and healthcare, with a focus on the homeless, education and youth, arts and culture, and responsible and ethical journalism.



| The schoolyard at Harry Kizirian Elementary School.



11. Improve the Cleanliness of Smith Street

Description

Throughout the planning process, the Planning Team received consistent feedback from residents and stakeholders that improved cleanliness is a major goal for the Smith Hill neighborhood. At Community Meeting 1, one of the five most frequently used words to describe Smith Hill Today was 'Dirty' and the most frequently used word to describe the Smith Hill of Tomorrow was 'Clean'. Several contributing factors affecting the cleanliness of Smith Hill include: deteriorating public trash receptacles, lack of trash receptacles along the corridor, lack of accountability from businesses not cleaning up in front of their storefronts, and infrequent, unreliable trash collection from the City.

Old, unappealing public trash receptacles should be replaced with ones that are new and more visually appealing. Additional trash

cans should be installed along the corridor at critical intersections. Businesses should be held to a higher standard to remove trash in their parking lots and in front of their storefronts. The City should perform its essential duty to ensure trash collection is done respectfully and frequently within the corridor.

Action Steps

1. Engage the Smith Hill community on neighborhood cleanup strategies. Develop a better understanding where litter is a recurring issue, where more trash receptacles are needed, and how to partner with the City of Providence Department of Public Works to ensure trash collection is improved and monitoring is more attentive.
2. Make use of existing communications materials designed to help prevent littering. Ensure public facing information is highly visible.
3. Organize regular corridor-wide cleanup efforts either through a group of dedicated volunteers or an organized group. Build off the efforts from the Elmhurst Clean and Green neighborhood group.
4. Replace deteriorating public trash receptacles with new and improved waste bins.

5. Install new public trash receptacles at strategic locations along the Smith Street corridor.
6. Continue to support and expand local initiatives intended to prevent litter on the streets and sidewalks.
7. Celebrate litter prevention successes to reinforce positive behaviors and raise awareness through existing media channels.
8. Once the Smith Street Merchants Association is developed, create a long-term program for cleanliness in tandem with local business improvements.

Lead Partner

The City of Providence Department of Public Works is responsible for operations, maintenance, planning, construction and engineering of public works infrastructure and waste management for the City.

Potential Partners

- Councilwoman Kat Kerwin
- SHPI
- SHARP
- Smith Hill CDC
- Elmhurst Clean and Green neighborhood group
- The Smith Hill Merchants Association

Potential Resources

- **City of Providence Neighborhood Improvement Funds (NIF):** NIF funds are neighborhood infrastructure dollars available through the City's general fund and allocated by the City Council. These funds can be used for a variety of infrastructure needs in their respective wards, including (but not limited to) community centers, playgrounds, schools, road paving, traffic calming and safety, and sidewalk repairs.
- **Community Development Block Grant (CDBG):** The primary goal of the CDBG program is the development of viable urban communities through improved living environments, expansion of economic opportunity, and provision and preservation of decent, affordable housing. Funds are intended to serve low-and moderate-income residents and neighborhoods.
- **Rhode Island Foundation Community Grant:** Provides grants up to \$10,000 for community-making efforts. For 2020, the Foundation is looking for projects that build social networks and connections among neighbors; develop and sustain strong relationships that persist over time; enhance the role of shared public spaces as community anchors; help people collaborate in order to identify goals, solve problems, or make group decisions; and share traditions with community members.



A public trash can is tipped over along Smith Street near Oakland Avenue
(Source: Elmhurst Clean & Green Facebook Page).

- **The Main Street Rhode Island Streetscape Improvement Fund:** The Fund awards grants or loans on a competitive basis for improvements to our commercial districts, such as enhanced sidewalks, new street furniture, new way-finding signage, upgraded building facades, and improved street lighting. Projects can receive up to \$300,000 in funding. Applicants must have matching funds of at least 30% of the total project cost.
- **Capital Improvement Program (CIP):** The City's Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) is a five-year program of planned improvements to Providence's public infrastructure.

MEDIUM PRIORITY PROJECTS





PROJECT RANKING

At Steering Committee Meeting 3, members helped to rank and prioritize projects based on critical needs, supporting local partners and initiatives, and potential catalytic effects. The following six projects are ranked as **medium priorities** on the action agenda for revitalization:

- 12 Hold a Taste of Smith Hill Festival
- 13 Beautify Smith Hill through Tree Trimming and Landscaping
- 14 Conduct a Neighborhood Lighting Study and Consider a Neighborhood Porch Lighting Program
- 15 Redesign and Connect Russell J Boyle Plaza and Joseph P Hassett Sr Memorial Park for Higher Utilization
- 16 Work with Property Owners to make the Aldi's Commercial Area More Attractive
- 17 Encourage Greater Utilization of the Rogers Recreation Center
- 18 Encourage Local College Students to Volunteer as Local Tutors
- 19 Establish a Neighborhood STEAM and Robotics Club



12. Hold a Taste of Smith Hill Festival

Description

Historically, Smith Hill has been a port-of-entry community for various immigrant and cultural groups that continues today. Recognizing that Smith Hill is a colorful, vibrant, and diverse community, the Smith Hill Block Party should be expanded to become a larger and more inclusive Taste of Smith Hill Festival. This Festival should celebrate the neighborhood while highlighting a variety of cultural and ethnic groups, showcasing unique cuisine along with art, music, and dance. However, due to uncertainty surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, the Taste of Smith Hill Festival was canceled in the interest of public health. The event has been postponed to 2021.

Action Steps

1. The Steering Committee, led by Half-Full, is currently working on organizing the Taste of Smith Hill Festival as an

expanded and rebranded Smith Hill Block Party for 2021. It is recommended that a small sub-committee be formed to help guide this effort

2. Identify a location for the Festival that is convenient for both neighborhood residents and visitors.
3. Identify a date for the Festival that will not conflict with other local or major city events.
4. Begin to structure the various elements of the Festival with a focus on local art, culture and cuisine.
5. Reach out to partners for support and participation in the Festival.
6. Utilize the Festival to promote the projects and strategies outlined in the Revitalization Plan, and to celebrate successes that have been achieved by neighborhood stakeholders.
7. During the Festival, be sure to collect data relating to the number of visitors, and what activities and elements are most popular.
8. Following the Festival, assess the data and feedback provided by attendees in order to develop recommendations for larger neighborhood strategies, as well as the next year's Festival.

Lead Partner

Half-Full: Coordination and planning of event with local stakeholders.

Potential Partners

- City of Providence Department of Art, Culture + Tourism
- SHPI
- SHARP
- Smith Hill CDC

Potential Resources

- **Providence Tourism Grant:** Proposals should demonstrate the ability to draw visitors into Providence that have an economic impact which benefits residents and generates awareness and marketing exposure for the City.
- **Rhode Island Foundation Community Grant:** Provides grants up to \$10,000 for community-making efforts. For 2020, the Foundation is looking for projects that build social networks and connections among neighbors; develop and sustain strong relationships that persist over time; enhance the role of shared public spaces as community anchors; help people collaborate in order to identify goals, solve problems, or make group decisions; and share traditions with community members.



13. Beautify Smith Hill through Tree Trimming and Landscaping

Description

The community feedback received during the planning process revealed a desire for more trees along the corridor, better landscaped public sidewalks, and improved tree trimming and maintenance. Although there was less consensus from Community Meeting 1 attendees when asked ‘What streetscape improvements are most needed?’, ‘Street trees and landscaping’ came in first with 38% of the vote. Overgrown trees blocking sidewalk paths was cited as a common complaint throughout the neighborhood. Adding more public landscaping would enhance the neighborhood’s aesthetics, reduce stormwater runoff, improve air quality, absorb traffic noise, and encourage more traveling on foot.

Action Steps

1. Coordinate with the City Forester to address areas where tree trimming is needed especially in instances where limbs are damaged, branches are low, and streetlights are obscured.
2. Work with the Providence Neighborhood Planting Program and City Forester to identify locations where new street trees are needed or desired.
3. Identify a community partner to commit and contribute to maintenance of any new landscape improvements (beyond street trees) that might be desired within the Project Area.
4. Identify areas where additional public landscape improvements are needed or desired once a maintenance partner has been identified. Build off the efforts from the Elmhurst Clean and Green neighborhood group.
5. Update and map out the Providence Tree Inventory and other sidewalk information to help promote public awareness.
6. Celebrate landscape improvements to raise awareness through existing media channels and build off the momentum to improve other areas of the neighborhood.

Lead Partner

City of Providence Forestry Division: The Forestry Division of the City of Providence Parks Department manages the city’s 27,400 street trees, as well as all trees in city parks and on public property. It handles more than 2,000 service requests from Providence residents each year, including dead tree removal, tree pruning, pick-up of fallen branches, and stump removal.

Potential Partners

- Councilwoman Kat Kerwin
- SHPI
- SHARP
- Smith Hill CDC
- Elmhurst Clean and Green neighborhood group
- Providence Neighborhood Planting Program

Potential Resources

- **The Providence Neighborhood Planting Program (PNPP):** A street tree planting partnership between the Mary Elizabeth Sharpe Providence Neighborhood Planting Program Fund, the City of Providence, and the residents of Providence. Their mission is to plant, steward, and advocate for trees in Providence. They provide free street trees to Providence residents through the Neighborhood Street Tree Planting

Awards, by training and empowering people to become Providence Community Tree Keepers, and by fostering engagement with the Urban Forest.

- **The Rhode Island Tree Council's Tree Steward Course:** The Tree Steward Course combines learning about trees, caring for trees, and understanding how people and trees can best grow together. Participants increase their knowledge and appreciation for tree biology, tree identification, tree planting & pruning, tree health, urban forestry and soils.
- **The Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management's Division of Forest Environment:** Each year the DEM Division of Forest Environment announces its cost share grants program to assist communities in developing sustainable forestry programs.
- **The Arbor Day Foundation:** The Arbor Day Foundation is the largest 501(c)3 nonprofit membership organization dedicated to planting trees. More than 1 million members, supporters, and valued partners have helped the foundation plant more than 350 million trees in neighborhoods, communities, cities, and forests throughout the world to ensure a greener and healthier future for everyone. Their Tree City USA program provides an opportunity for cities to receive resources to help green their communities.



One of ten trees planted on Tyndall Avenue by the Elmhurst Clean and Green neighborhood group in November 2019 (Source: Elmhurst Clean & Green Facebook Page).



14. Conduct a Neighborhood Lighting Study and Consider a Neighborhood Porch Lighting Program

Description

Residents have identified inadequate lighting as a primary concern. The City and its partners should conduct a lighting study to identify areas with inadequate or broken street lights and areas where overgrown trees or landscaping block lights. This inventory could be done with high school and college students working in teams to record data.

A porch lighting program is also recommended to improve neighborhood lighting. This Program would assist residents in installing and maintaining low-energy, high-output lights that come on automatically at dusk and turn off at dawn. This project would also allow neighborhood

partners to engage in community-building by meeting residents and providing opportunities for neighbors to engage with one another at social events designed to promote the program.

Action Steps

Recommended steps for implementation of a neighborhood lighting program include:

- 1. Identify the Overall Project Goal:** Project goals can include reduction in utility costs, public desire for additional lights, replacement of current dilapidated lights, improving safety for all road users, minimizing glare and light pollution, supporting economic development, and improving aesthetics on Smith Street.
- 2. Identify Project Funding:** Project funding should be identified and established early in the process since it will impact the type, location and number of fixtures that can be purchased. City officials must simultaneously consider multiple funding streams at the municipal, state, and federal levels. Overall, the energy and maintenance costs from a well-designed and sustainably-driven project will create savings over the long term.
- 3. Conduct a Night Time Survey and Identify Locations for New or Improved Lights:** Assess where lighting is inadequate and may need to be

improved. Start on Smith Street before addressing side streets within Smith Hill. Also identify where existing lighting may be blocked by overgrown landscape or other features. Based on the survey, as well as municipal lighting standards, identify locations for new or improved lights within the planning area.

- 4. Install new or improved lights within the planning area.**
- 5. Ensure maintenance of new or improved lights within the neighborhood.**

Recommended steps for implementation of a porch lighting program include:

1. Create a committee to help lead effort.
2. Identify local sponsors or donations for LED light bulbs.
3. Promote the program through local media, schools and neighborhood flyers.
4. Develop a neighborhood pledge to keep porch lights lit that can be signed by local residents.
5. Organize a series of social events and canvassing days where each Smith Hill home would receive a free LED light bulb to install on the front porch as long as the resident agrees to leave the light on throughout the night.
6. Track the success of the program through quarterly porch lighting surveys.

Lead Partner

City of Providence Department of Planning and Development: Organize local students to help conduct neighborhood lighting assessment.

Potential Partners

- City of Providence Department of Public Property
- RIDOT
- City of Providence Office of Sustainability
- City of Providence Forestry Division
- SHARP
- SHPI

Potential Resources

- **Street Light Incentives:** As of August 1, 2014, Rhode Island municipalities can purchase and maintain their own street lights pursuant to the Municipal Streetlight Investment Act . For municipalities planning to purchase existing National Grid-owned streetlights – and for State agencies and municipalities that may already own their streetlights – there are financial incentives available to assist with LED streetlight conversion.



In 2016, the Providence City Council approves an initiative to begin converting their street lights to LEDs
(Source: City of Providence).

- **Rhode Island Foundation Responsive Grant:** Responsive Grants are awarded to respond to the expressed needs of the community. Nonprofit organizations that are interested in applying should be addressing urgent community need, emerging opportunity, testing new ideas, or supporting proven programs.



15. Redesign and Connect Russell J Boyle Plaza and Joseph P Hassett Sr Memorial Park for Higher Utilization

Description

Boyle Plaza and Hassett Memorial Park are adjacent to one another, separated by Orms Street and six-foot high fencing. Redesigning these two public spaces, along with the Orms Street sidewalk and roadway, would create a stronger connection between these existing community assets, improving neighborhood access, activity, and safety. This public investment would also encourage mixed-use development on vacant or underutilized sites nearby. Elements of this redesign could include traffic calming on Orms Street, new ornamental fencing, public seating, improved play equipment or a splash pad, landscaping and trees, signage, lighting, art installations, and areas for performances, temporary markets and food trucks.

Action Steps

1. Work with a landscape architect to develop a concept plan for both the Park and Plaza that align with the community's vision for the Smith / Orms focus area.
2. Evaluate various traffic calming features on Orms Street, including curb extensions, painted crosswalks and other elements designed to slow vehicles and create a safer pedestrian connection between the two spaces.
3. Work with the community to gather feedback on conceptual plans for the Park and Plaza, and to ensure broad public support and buy-in.
4. Once funding is available, consider utilizing volunteers when possible to help improve both public spaces.
5. Activate spaces with programmed events, activities and installations.

Lead Partners

City of Providence Parks Department and the City of Providence Department of Planning and Development: Develop initial design concept drawings and planning for the enhancement of Russell J Boyle Plaza and Joseph P Hasset Sr Memorial Park.

Potential Partners

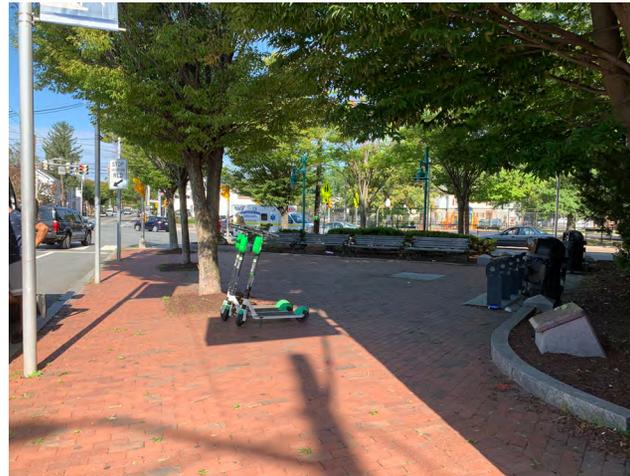
- City of Providence Department of Planning and Development
- City of Providence Department of Art, Culture + Tourism
- Our Streets Providence
- RIDOT
- City of Providence DPW

Potential Resources

- **City of Providence Neighborhood Improvement Funds (NIF):** NIF funds are neighborhood infrastructure dollars available through the City's general fund and allocated by the City Council. These funds can be used for a variety of infrastructure needs in their respective wards, including (but not limited to) community centers, playgrounds, schools, road paving, traffic calming and safety, and sidewalk repairs.
- **Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (DEM) Outdoor Recreation Grants:** This grant program provides matching funds to cities and towns and recognized Native American tribes for the acquisition, development and renovation of outdoor recreational lands and facilities.
- **Rhode Island Foundation Community Grant:** Provides grants up to \$10,000 for community-making efforts. For 2020, the Foundation is looking for projects that build social networks and connections

among neighbors; develop and sustain strong relationships that persist over time; enhance the role of shared public spaces as community anchors; help people collaborate in order to identify goals, solve problems, or make group decisions; and share traditions with community members.

- **Community Development Block Grant (CDBG):** The primary goal of the CDBG program is the development of viable urban communities through improved living environments, expansion of economic opportunity, and provision and preservation of decent, affordable housing. Funds are intended to serve low-and moderate-income residents and neighborhoods.
- **Providence Streets Coalition Fund to Promote Safe Streets and Urban Walkability During the Era of Social Distancing:** The Coalition will award micro-grants ranging from \$500 to \$3,000 for proposals that build excitement, momentum, and grassroots support for safer and healthier streets, expanded public space, and more transportation choices in our local communities. Applications are likely to range from projects that help install creative signage to reinforce COVID-era queuing etiquette at bus stops, markets, and takeout locations; to the design and installation of aesthetic and durable barricades and signage to help local



| Russell J Boyle Plaza (Left) and Joseph P Hassett Sr Memorial Park (Right).

restaurants create and designate outdoor dining. Others may include temporary art installations along streets that have been designated as future urban trails as a part of the City's Great Streets Initiative or funding that supports the creation of socially-distanced walking and biking tours of the City's neighborhoods.



16. Work with Property Owners to Make the ALDI's Commercial Area More Attractive

Description

The Aldi's commercial area at Smith and Ruggles Streets is currently unwelcoming, with low visibility. This Focus Area should be improved by working with local property owners to implement the following changes:

- Planting street trees and new landscaping,
- Creating public art and landscaped "green walls" along blank facades on Smith Street,
- Expanding neighborhood retail offerings by creating new infill buildings with a pharmacy or bank, and
- Installing more visible and attractive signage along the Smith Street side of the building.

Action Steps

- Meet with the shopping center property owner and surrounding commercial property owners on Smith Street to discuss beautification and revitalization efforts.
- Coordinate private beautification efforts with public streetscape investments in the area.
- Once established, utilize the Smith Street Merchants Association to identify and fundraise additional resources for local beautification and revitalization efforts.

Lead Partner

City of Providence Department of Planning and Development: Connect with local property owners to share the Revitalization Plan and initiate dialogue relating to potential local improvements.

Potential Partners

- Property Owners
- City of Providence Department of Art, Culture + Tourism

Potential Resources

- **City of Providence Neighborhood Improvement Funds (NIF):** NIF funds are neighborhood infrastructure dollars available through the City's general fund and allocated by the City Council. These funds can be used for a variety of infrastructure needs in their respective

wards, including (but not limited to) community centers, playgrounds, schools, road paving, traffic calming and safety, and sidewalk repairs.

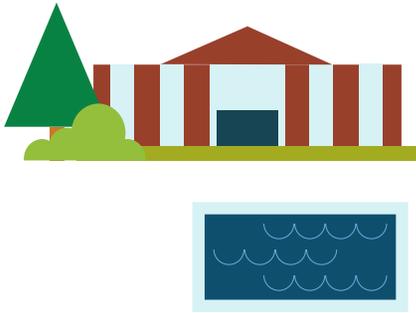
- **The Main Street Rhode Island Streetscape Improvement Fund** awards grants or loans on a competitive basis for improvements to our commercial districts, such as enhanced sidewalks, new street furniture, new way-finding signage, upgraded building facades, and improved street lighting. Projects can receive up to \$300,000 in funding. Applicants must have matching funds of at least 30% of the total project cost.
- **Rhode Island Foundation Community Grant:** Provides grants up to \$10,000 for community-making efforts. For 2020, the Foundation is looking for projects that build social networks and connections among neighbors; develop and sustain strong relationships that persist over time; enhance the role of shared public spaces as community anchors; help people collaborate in order to identify goals, solve problems, or make group decisions; and share traditions with community members.
- **Community Development Block Grant (CDBG):** The primary goal of the CDBG program is the development of viable urban communities through improved living environments, expansion of economic opportunity, and provision and preservation of decent, affordable

housing. Funds are intended to serve low-and moderate-income residents and neighborhoods.

- **United Plant Savers Community Planting Grant:** United Plant Savers has a fund designated for community planting projects. UPS guidelines require that the project have educational merit and have permission from the land owner for the project.



| Approaching the ALDI commercial area (Left), the parking lot/entrance to the ALDI grocery store (Right).



17. Encourage Greater Utilization of the Rogers Recreation Center

Description

The Rogers Recreation Center provides residents with easy access to recreational activities and educational programs, and acts as a social gathering place. Current programs include athletics and fitness, a homework and reading club, an art club, mentoring programs, a bowling league, and a movie club. In order to increase community health, nutrition and fitness, it is recommended that an expanded athletic program is created, centered on the Rogers Recreation Center. This program could include increased athletic coordinator staff hours to enable the center to incorporate new sports and activities. In the long-term, the community has expressed a desire to expand the Rogers Recreation Center to host additional programs.

Action Steps

1. Meet with the City of Providence Recreation Department to assess current programs and needs related to the Rogers Recreation Center.
2. Evaluate the gaps in programming and begin to identify partners that would be willing to provide additional services.
3. Work with the City of Providence Recreation Department to potentially extend open hours for the Rogers Recreation Center.
4. Continue to recruit local volunteers to help provide additional programming, fundraising and Recreation Center assistance efforts.
5. In order to provide long-term space for additional programs, the Plan recommends that the Rogers Recreation Center evaluate their spatial needs and examine potential for physical expansion. Potential expansion areas could include the grassy lawns west or north of the existing building.

Lead Partner

- **City of Providence Recreation Department:** Organize Rogers Recreation Center staff and local residents to begin brainstorming potential improvements.

Potential Partners

- City of Providence Community Relations Office
- Providence Public Schools

Potential Resources

- **City of Providence Neighborhood Improvement Funds (NIF):** NIF funds are neighborhood infrastructure dollars available through the City's general fund and allocated by the City Council. These funds can be used for a variety of infrastructure needs in their respective wards, including (but not limited to) community centers, playgrounds, schools, road paving, traffic calming and safety, and sidewalk repairs.
- **Rhode Island Foundation Responsive Grant:** Responsive Grants are awarded to respond to the expressed needs of the community. Nonprofit organizations that are interested in applying should be addressing urgent community need, emerging opportunity, testing new ideas, or supporting proven programs.
- **Rhode Island Foundation Juanita Sánchez Community Fund Grant:** The fund provides support for Rhode Island's Latino community by offering grant assistance to nonprofit organizations working for the betterment of the Latino community in the state.



18. Encourage Local College Students to Volunteer as Local Tutors

Description

In conjunction with local colleges, universities, and public schools, the neighborhood should establish a more robust youth mentorship program that connects college students with youth in the community. This program could provide mentees with a positive role model and demonstrate the benefits of academic success and staying involved in the community. The program can build off of programs currently available on Saturdays at the Rogers Recreation Center relating to athletic and educational experiences and positive guidance related to sports and recreation.

Action Steps

Recommended steps to initiate a program in Smith Hill, as outlined by youth.gov, include:

- 1. Assessing Needs and Resources:** By identifying what needs and resources are available in Smith Hill, it will help to determine if there are existing programs with a similar mission or potential partners for collaboration. Key stakeholders should be identified to help generate buy-in.
- 2. Designing the Parameters:** Define the youth population that will be served with consideration of age, gender, mentoring need, and common characteristics. Identify who to recruit as mentors, and determine the type and focus of mentoring relationships which are needed. Create a schedule and location for mentoring sessions and determine their length and desired outcomes to be evaluated.
- 3. Management:** Identify a management team, establish management policies and procedures, develop and implement ongoing training, and develop a financial plan. The mentoring program should be continuously evaluated and adjusted as needed.

+ Adapted from “Starting a Program,” youth.gov (youth.gov/youth-topics/mentoring/considerations-starting-mentoring-program)

Lead Partner

Providence Public Schools: Assess local needs and resources, and to connect with potential University and College partners.

Potential Partners

- University and College Partners

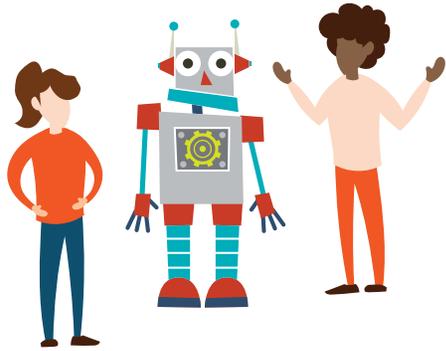
Potential Resources

- **Rhode Island Foundation Community Grant:** Provides grants up to \$10,000 for community-making efforts. For 2020, the Foundation is looking for projects that build social networks and connections among neighbors; develop and sustain strong relationships that persist over time; enhance the role of shared public spaces as community anchors; help people collaborate in order to identify goals, solve problems, or make group decisions; and share traditions with community members.
- **Rhode Island Foundation Responsive Grant:** Responsive Grants are awarded to respond to the expressed needs of the community. Nonprofit organizations interested in applying should be addressing urgent community needs, emerging opportunities, testing new ideas, or supporting proven programs.

- **Rhode Island Foundation Providence Journal Charitable Legacy Fund Grant:** The Fund supports qualified nonprofit organizations that provide programs and services in the areas of human services and healthcare, with a focus on the homeless, education and youth, arts and culture, and responsible and ethical journalism.
- **Rhode Island Foundation Juanita Sánchez Community Fund Grant:** The fund provides support for Rhode Island's Latino community by offering grant assistance to nonprofit organizations working for the betterment of the Latino community in the state.



| Providence College students are a potential resource for academic tutoring and mentorship.



19. Establish a Neighborhood STEAM and Robotics Club

Description

STEAM Education is an approach to learning that uses Science, Technology, Engineering, the Arts and Mathematics as access points for guiding student inquiry, dialogue, and critical thinking. Local partners should establish a STEAM and Robotics after-school program hosted at the Rogers Recreation Center, Smith Hill Library, or Kizirian Elementary School. Participating students could rotate through educational modules designed to teach them how to solve problems, design systems, and live a more sustainable lifestyle.

Action Steps

1. **Outline Topics:** Define an outline for elements to cover in the club. Topics could include robotics, engineering, electricity, architecture, problem-solving, and sustainable energy.

2. **Sign Ups:** Work on getting local students signed up for the club. Coordinate with local schools to spread the word and pass out sign-up forms.
3. **Time and Location:** Identify a time and location for club meetings.

+ Adapted from "Starting a STEAM Club," Mr. Mault's Marketplace (www.edtech101.org/starting-a-steam-club/)

Lead Partner

STEAM Box: STEAM Box is a youth-led nonprofit designed to allow students to explore their passions through science, technology, engineering, art and math projects.

Potential Partners

- AS220
- Providence Community Library network
- Steel Yard

Potential Resources

- **American Honda Foundation STEM Grant:** Each year, the American Honda Foundation awards grants of \$20,000 to \$75,000 for STEM and STEAM education projects, with an average of 27 grants awarded annually.
- **21st Century Community Learning Centers:** This program provides money for before- and after-school programs. Funds may be used for expanding learning activities or any

area of enrichment and must include technology, such as: robotic kits, engineering kits, science kits, STEM Education kits, or telecommunication education.

- **Education Technology State Grant:** This program has a sum directed toward the effective integration of technology to ensure that students are technologically literate by the end of eighth grade.
- **GEAR Up:** This discretionary grant program is designed to increase the number of low-income students who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education.
- **Rhode Island Foundation Responsive Grant:** Responsive Grants are awarded to respond to the expressed needs of the community. Nonprofit organizations that are interested in applying should be addressing urgent community need, emerging opportunities, testing new ideas, or supporting proven programs.
- **Rhode Island Foundation Providence Journal Charitable Legacy Fund Grant:** The Fund supports qualified nonprofit organizations that provide programs and services in the areas of human services and healthcare, with a focus on the homeless, education and youth, arts and culture, and responsible and ethical journalism.

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STEAM Box offers youth experiential learning opportunities in STEAM: Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, & Math (Source: STEAM Box Facebook Group Page).

LOWER PRIORITY PROJECTS





20. Create a Smith Hill Restaurant Guide and Food Tour

Description

Promoting local restaurants to the broader public is a goal of the community. This project would establish a map, directory, and guide to the neighborhood's unique offerings. The guide could be distributed to State workers, local students, and Downtown hotels to encourage residents outside of Smith Hill and visitors to Providence to visit the neighborhood.

Action Steps

1. Utilizing the Smith Hill CDC's guide to Smith Hill, create a map of all existing restaurants and food-related businesses in the neighborhood. Note whether the restaurant offers delivery, take-out, and/or online ordering.

2. As new restaurants open, modify the guide to keep it up to date.
3. Encourage local restaurants to have booths at the Taste of Smith Hill Festival.
4. Roll out the guide in advance of the Taste of Smith Hill Festival, and distribute to festival attendees.
5. Organize a walking tour to stop at participating restaurants for a small sample of their cuisine.

Lead Partner

SHARP: The goal of SHARP is to focus on solving problems that impact the Smith Hill community and implement solutions by aligning resources as a committed and powerful workforce.

Potential Partners

- SHPI
- Rhode Tour

Potential Resources

- **Rhode Island Foundation Media Project Grant:** Designed to assure greater access to information by targeted individuals.
- **Rhode Island Foundation Community Grant:** Provides grants up to \$10,000 for community-making efforts. For 2020, the Foundation is looking for projects that build social networks and connections among neighbors; develop and sustain strong relationships that persist over

time; enhance the role of shared public spaces as community anchors; help people collaborate in order to identify goals, solve problems, or make group decisions; and share traditions with community members.



21. Widen Sidewalks to Encourage Outdoor Dining

Description

Outdoor dining areas could help existing local businesses and increase the vitality of Smith Street. Where possible, outdoor seating should be located to the front of restaurants; however, in places that are heavily constrained, outdoor dining could be encouraged along side streets, within a portion of adjacent parking lots, or through the strategic transition of on-street parking spaces into seating areas through widened sidewalks or temporary parklets.

Action Steps

1. Examine the areas around each existing restaurant on Smith Street, evaluate potential opportunities for outdoor dining within the property, or on the public right of way.
2. Encourage restaurant owners to consider adding outdoor dining to their establishments, as long as it meets City regulations.
3. Where no space is available, consider converting one or more on-street parking spaces into seating areas, as long as it will not negatively impact local businesses.

Lead Partner

City of Providence Department of Planning and Development: Organize local restaurant owners to evaluate the benefits of increased outdoor seating capacity.

Potential Partners

- Restaurant Owners
- Office of Economic Opportunity

Potential Resources

- **The Main Street Rhode Island Streetscape Improvement Fund:** The Fund awards grants or loans on a competitive basis for improvements to our commercial districts, such as enhanced sidewalks, new street furniture, new way-finding signage, upgraded

building facades, and improved street lighting. Projects can receive up to \$300,000 in funding. Applicants must have matching funds of at least 30% of the total project cost.

- **City of Providence Neighborhood Improvement Funds (NIF):** The NIF includes neighborhood infrastructure dollars available through the City's general fund and allocated by the City Council. These funds can be used for a variety of infrastructure needs in their respective wards, including community centers, playgrounds, schools, road paving, traffic calming, and sidewalk repairs.
- **Community Development Block Grant (CDBG):** The primary goal of the CDBG program is the development of viable urban communities through improved living environments, expansion of economic opportunity, and provision and preservation of decent, affordable housing. Funds are intended to serve low-and moderate-income residents and neighborhoods.



22. Encourage Hotels, Inns, and other Lodging

Description

At present, there is one bed and breakfast in the Smith Hill neighborhood, the historic Christopher Dodge House on West Park Street just south of Smith Street. This property is within walking distance of the State House and caters to business visitors here and elsewhere in the City with rooms ranging from \$120 to \$150 a night. Additionally, there are currently 52 short-term rentals listed on Airbnb, ranging in price from around \$30 to \$104 per night. Because of its proximity to Downtown and the State House, as well as the City's colleges and universities, there is potentially unmet demand for additional lodging and short-term accommodations within Smith Hill. Hotel, inn, and lodging development could help strengthen the customer base for Smith Hill businesses. Currently, the majority of properties along Smith Street are designated

as C-1 or C-2 Commercial Districts, which permit hotel use. Larger scale hospitality development in blocks off of Smith Street would likely require zoning changes. The Plan recommends evaluating areas on the eastern side of the neighborhood, in close proximity to Interstate 95, for potential amendments. These areas are designated R-4 and R-3, which do not permit hotel use. Rezoning portions of these areas to C-1 or C-2, could stimulate hotel development on vacant or underutilized properties within close proximity to Downtown Providence and the State House.

Action Steps

1. Begin by focusing on expanding bed and breakfast and Airbnb offerings within the neighborhood as long as they conform with existing regulation.
2. Evaluate permitted uses under existing zoning designations and modify if necessary to encourage new lodging uses on Smith Street.

Lead Partner

City of Providence Department of Planning and Development: Evaluate existing regulations in order to potentially promote additional hospitality uses in the community.

Potential Partners

- Providence / Warwick Convention and Visitors Bureau
- RI Commerce Corporation

Potential Resources

- **Small Business Administration (SBA) Loans** are widely considered the best business loan for bed and breakfasts with higher loan amounts, longer repayment terms, and lowest interest rates.
- **SBA Microloan:** SBA Microloans are the most suitable options especially for startups, which provide loans amounts up to \$50,000. To qualify for SBA Microloans, you need to have strong personal credit.



23. Establish an International Restaurant Incubator including Food Industry Training and Food Production Program for Nearby Anchor Institutions

Description

In order to grow the local food industry while connecting residents to new opportunities, an international restaurant incubator should be pursued as part of a new development or as a use for an existing building in Smith Hill. The incubator can celebrate culinary-cultural exchange, spur cultural economic development, and support immigrant communities. The incubator could include a restaurant space, culinary entrepreneurship programs, cooking and food-handling classes, and space for local food festivals.

Action Steps

- 1. Establish a Leadership Structure:** This effort would effectively be the initial undertaking to get the idea of the ground. It focuses on creating a champion and advocate for the Restaurant Incubator and all of the tasks needed to implement the project.
- 2. Feasibility Study:** Advance the overall effort with an in-depth phase one feasibility study. This work could be supported by efforts such as the Local Food, Local Places Technical Assistance Program sponsored by the U.S. Department of Agricultural in partnership with the U.S. EPA, the Centers for Disease Control and other partnering agencies.
- 3. Pursue funding sources for Phase I capital project:** This step may consist of establishing base occupancy in a vacant building in Smith Hill with street visibility. It would likely require, at minimum, a community-shared commercial kitchen, flex processing, production, packaging, shipping, and a trade area.

Lead Partner

Social Enterprise Greenhouse: Social Enterprise Greenhouse creates positive social and economic impact by providing social entrepreneurs and enterprises with the tools and networks they need to thrive. The organization fosters an ecosystem of diverse stakeholders who work to enable a more just, equitable and resilient economy.

Potential Partners

- Global Shapers Providence
- Johnson and Wales University
- Farm Fresh RI

Potential Resources

- U.S. HHS Administration for Children and Families (OCS) Community Economic Development Grant:** Supports employment and business development projects that provide economic self-sufficiency for low-income residents and their communities.
- USDA Local Food Promotion Program (LFPP) and Farmers Market Promotion Program (FMPP):** FMPP provides funds for developing, improving, expanding, and providing outreach, training, and technical assistance to domestic farmers markets, roadside stands, community-supported agriculture programs, agritourism activities, and other direct producer-to-consumer market opportunities.
- USDA Community Food Program:** Supports planning and implementation projects that promote access to local foods, increase nutritional literacy, and reduce food insecurity in low-income communities.
- Local Food, Local Places:** Provides direct technical support to help communities build strong local food systems as part of their emerging economic action plans.

What types of businesses are most needed on Smith Street?

- **Rhode Island Foundation Community Grant:** Provides grants up to \$10,000 for community-making efforts. For 2020, the Foundation is looking for projects that build social networks and connections among neighbors; develop and sustain strong relationships that persist over time; enhance the role of shared public spaces as community anchors; help people collaborate in order to identify goals, solve problems, or make group decisions; and share traditions with community members.
- **Rhode Island Foundation Providence Journal Charitable Legacy Fund Grant:** The Fund supports qualified nonprofit organizations that provide programs and services in the areas of human services and healthcare, with a focus on the homeless, education and youth, arts and culture, and responsible and ethical journalism.

Restaurants



Apparel or home goods

0%

Barber/Beauty Salons

0%

Pharmacy



Other



The keypad polling exercise at Community Meeting 1 revealed a strong desire for more restaurants along Smith Street -- particularly those focused on international cuisines to celebrate the neighborhood's diverse population.



24. Establish and Sustain an Online Neighborhood Social Media Presence and Neighborhood Newsletter

Improving neighborhood communications is a core goal of residents. As Smith Hill continues to host community gatherings and events to cultivate a more connected neighborhood feel, a community newsletter can help ensure all residents are aware of the exciting things going on and promote goods and services available in the community. A quarterly community newsletter, developed by SHARP, in conjunction with Providence College, could provide times and dates of upcoming events, while providing community members with an easy way to keep track of all the things they could participate in. This Plan also recommends creating a community website and greater social media presence to reach a

broader neighborhood audience. An active social media presence and utilization of web platforms such as *www.nextdoor.com* can include relevant content posted regularly, help keep residents engaged, assist with crime prevention, communicate emergency alerts, promote community activities and volunteerism, and promote neighborhood meetings to educate citizens on governmental matters.

Action Steps

Recommended steps for developing a newsletter, as adapted from the **Yes We Can! Neighborhood Newsletter How-to Guide**

- 1. Determine the Roles:** Form a newsletter committee made up of people from Smith Hill and Providence College. Identify individuals with interest and capabilities to fill roles such as editor, reporter, writer and designer.
- 2. Define the Purpose:** It is important to define what the committee is hoping to accomplish with the creation and distribution of the newsletter, and how it will benefit those who read it.
- 3. Identify the Audience:** To help plan the contents of the newsletter, it will be helpful to gather information about the people who will be receiving it. A short survey can help to define topics that residents are interested in.
- 4. Develop a Publishing Schedule:** The committee should decide how many newsletters are produced per year. As the process becomes more established and readership grows, newsletters can be developed more frequently.
- 5. Select Content:** Information about Smith Street should be balanced with fun and helpful articles that make life easier for readers. To connect with local branding efforts, articles should emphasize the positive events and features of Smith Hill. The newsletter should help to capture and promote the stories and the history of the neighborhood through interviews and research documentation.
- 6. Writing and Editing:** Writers should use a friendly, conversational tone. Language should be easy to understand, especially for non-native English speakers.
- 7. Design:** Determine the format and length of the newsletter, keeping cost and ease of production in mind.
- 8. Printing:** Determine the number of copies that will be printed and evaluate costs based on ink and paper supplies.
- 9. Distribution:** Hand delivering the newsletter to local businesses and community services helps ensure personal contact to encourage residents get involved and interested. An electronic copy of the newsletter should also be available for residents who prefer to view the publication on digital platforms.

10. Gather feedback: Taking feedback from neighbors into consideration will help make the newsletter more effective and readable.

11. Regularly update the “Know Your Neighborhood” booklet as part of the newsletter initiative: Produced by the Smith Hill CDC, the booklet could serve as a guide for information related to local resources, meetings, organizations, and need-to-know events.

+ Adapted from “How to Create a Neighborhood Newsletter,” Yes we can! (www.grassrootsgrantmakers.org/wp-content/uploads/Create_a_Nhood_Newsletter.pdf)

Lead Partner

SHARP: Work with Providence College students to organize a sustainable newsletter program for Smith Hill.

Potential Partners

- SHPI
- Providence College
- Smith Hill CDC

Potential Resources

- **Rhode Island Foundation Media Project Grant:** Designed to assure greater access to information by targeted individuals.
- **Rhode Island Foundation Community Grant:** Provides grants up to \$10,000 for community-making efforts that make unique and important things happen at this intersection. For 2020, the Foundation is looking for that: Build social networks and connection among neighbors, Develop and sustain strong relationships that persist over time and experience, enhance the role of shared public spaces as community anchors, help people collaborate to identify goals, solve problems, or make group decisions, or share traditions with community members.

How to Create a Neighborhood Newsletter

Yes we can!

A neighborhood newsletter is a great way to get the word out and get people involved in activities going on in your neighborhood and the community.

A *How-to Guide* for neighborhood leaders working to make life better for people in Battle Creek



The Yes We Can! Neighborhood Newsletter How-to-Guide provides a framework to begin developing a neighborhood newsletter for Smith Hill.

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APPENDIX: RESIDENTIAL AND COMMERCIAL MARKET ANALYSIS

Smith Street Revitalization Plan

Residential and Commercial Market Analysis

Margaret Collins / *Cambridge Economic Research*



Final Report Prepared December 2019
For Camiros, Ltd. and the City of Providence

Cambridge Economic Research

Residential Market Analysis

Overview

The section of the report evaluates the housing market in the Smith Hill neighborhood. We first look at trends in the citywide housing market in Providence, where prices have been increasing rapidly due to limited supply and growing demand from commuters to jobs in Greater Boston. We then consider trends in availability and pricing of sales of residential property in Smith Hill, including single family houses, condominiums, and multi-family buildings. Finally, the supply of and demand for rental property in Smith Hill is analyzed and the impact of the demand for rentals from students is evaluated.

Providence Housing Market Trends

According to the Rhode Island Association of Realtors, the median sales price of single-family houses in the Providence Metro Area rose 9.1% to \$295,000 in the year ending Sept. 30, 2019. Sales increased by 12% from 12 months earlier, indicating strong demand. Likewise, condominium prices rose by 9% to \$243,000. Given the scarcity of single-family starter homes, condos have become attractive options for first time buyers. Multifamily properties followed a similar trend, with median price increasing by 8% to \$275,000; the number of closings decreased by 4.2 percent during the year ending Sept. 30, 2019, indicating a tight supply.

Inventory in all three sectors remains markedly low – hovering near a four-month supply for single-family homes and condominiums and a 3.5-month supply for multifamily properties. A six-month supply is considered a healthy balance between supply and demand by most industry experts.

In the past two years, there has been an influx of commuters moving to Providence from Boston. “Last year, probably 25 to 30 percent of our business was from people priced out of Boston and surrounding communities,” said Ben Scungio, an agent and office manager with the upscale Mott & Chace Sotheby’s International Realty in Providence.¹

“The market has changed dramatically in the last 12 months,” according to Sally Lapidés, president of Residential Properties in Providence. “It used to be that we saw two-briefcase families who had jobs in both cities,” she explained, with couples split between Boston and Providence

¹ Jon Gorey, *Home buyers weary of Greater Boston prices are slipping south to Rhode Island*, [Real Estate, Boston Globe.com](#), August 2019

often choosing the latter as a home base because of its less expensive housing, lack of traffic, and its lively arts and culture scene. “Now we’re seeing people who are moving here and commuting up to Boston like it was a suburb,” Lapides said.

The table below compares house prices in Providence with those of Greater Boston.

Median Sales Prices for Condominiums and Houses

Providence v Greater Boston

Jun-19

	<u>Condominiums</u>	<u>Single Family Houses</u>
Greater Boston	\$618,500	\$652,500
Providence	\$198,450	\$204,500

Sources: Greater Boston Assn. of Realtors & Rhode Island Assn. of Realtors

Both condominiums and single-family houses in Boston are more than 3 times more expensive than those in Providence.

Bargain-hunting city lovers priced out of Boston and Cambridge can skip right over all the strip mall-strewn exurbs to find affordable urban refuge in Providence, a small but vibrant city where they can walk to acclaimed restaurants, theaters, and arts events and commute to Boston by train. “People want community, and they want to have a good time, especially millennials,” Scungio said. And Providence delivers those goods at a hefty discount. “The price differential is dramatic,” Lapides said. “If you’re young and looking for your first home, it is pretty hard to get your foot in the door in Boston.”²

² Ibid.

The Smith Hill Housing Market

The Smith Hill neighborhood has a number of strengths for redevelopment and transition to higher uses. Key among them is the neighborhood's excellent transit links to downtown Boston's South Station. The neighborhood is a 49-minute commute by High Speed Rail and is just over an hour by conventional commuter rail. The eastern portion of the neighborhood is 10-15 minutes walk from the train station. There are two quick and frequent bus routes (#56 & #57) connecting other parts of the neighborhood to the Station.

Sales prices for single and multi-family houses are very low by Greater Boston standards, with single family houses priced at around \$140K to the low \$200K range. Two and three family buildings are selling for around the \$150,000 to \$300,000 range — around 25% to 30% of prices for multi-family buildings in Greater Boston suburbs with similar transit links. Lower purchase prices translate to rents that are affordable for commuters to greater Boston.

The most affordable service for both commuters to Boston as well as residents of Greater Boston needing to access jobs in Providence is the Commuter Rail Boston/Stoughton line. As the table below shows, there are 2 trains every hour between Providence and Boston at peak commuting times in the morning and in the evening. . The return fare — at \$25.50— is affordable for professional commuters.

Inter- City Rail Connections to Providence

<u>Service</u>	<u>Travel Time</u>	<u>Return Fare</u>	<u>Comments</u>
MBTA Commuter Rail	66-72 min.	\$25.50	Providence/Stoughton Line to Boston
Amtrak NE Regional	53 min.	\$34.00	Regional Service connecting BOS-PVD-NY-DC
Amtrak Acela Express	36 min.	\$80.00	High speed rail service with same connections as above

Sources: Train schedules & Cambridge Economic Research

According to the Leasing Office at the Foundry at the southern edge of the Smith Hill, a growing number of their tenants have relocated from Boston and commuter rail to access jobs in downtown Boston.³

³ Interview with Interview with Emily Gauthier, Leasing Agent, Promenade Apartments, Nov. 7, 2019

Smith Hill Single-Family Sales Market

As is the case elsewhere in Providence, there is a critical shortage of single-family houses on the market in the Smith Hill neighborhood. The table below shows that, as of November 2019, there were just six single-family houses on the market in the neighborhood. This is less than 2% of the total number of single-family houses in the neighborhood, which is estimated at 385 structures.⁴

Single Family Houses for Sale in Smith Hill Neighborhood

Nov-19

<u>Address</u>	<u>BR</u>	<u>Baths</u>	<u>Size (net sf)</u>	<u>Price</u>	<u>Price/sq.ft.</u>
41 Candace St.*	4	2	1,901	\$169,000	\$89
39 Osborne St.	2	3	2,071	\$220,000	\$106
11 Violet St.	4	2	1,892	\$235,000	\$124
131 Ruggles St.	3	1	960	\$140,000	\$146
170 Chad Brown St.	3	1	946	\$185,000	\$196
73 Camden Ave.	<u>3</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>786</u>	<u>\$170,000</u>	<u>\$216</u>
Averages	3.2	1.7	1,426	\$186,500	\$146

* Pre-foreclosure auction-This has been a rental property.

Sources: Redfin, Zillow, and Trulia & Cambridge Economic Research

Sales prices for single-family homes that are currently listed range from \$140,000 for a 3-bedroom house on Ruggles St. up to \$235,000 for a large 4 bedroom, 2-bathroom house on Violet St. This is the only single family house listed that is South of Smith St. Prices per sq. ft. range from \$89/sq. ft. for a house on Candace St up to \$216 sq.ft. for a smaller 3 bedroom house on Camden Ave.

⁴ Census Bureau, 2013-2017 American Community Survey



Four bedroom, three bath Single Family Home at 11 Violet St. currently listed for \$235,000.

Condominiums for Sale in Smith Hill

An MLS listings search conducted in early November 2019 showed only one condominium for sale in the Smith Hill neighborhood. This is a bank-owned 3-bedroom unit of 1032 sq. ft. in the Annex on Douglas St. is a foreclosure. Just outside the Smith Hill neighborhood, in the 903 Residences at Providence Place just south of the Woonasquatucket River, some 22 condominium units are for sale. Given the low availability of single-family houses in the neighborhood, there is ample opportunity for development of condo units. Given the lack of redevelopment sites in the neighborhood, the best prospects for developing the condominium market in the neighborhood is conversion of existing 2 and 3-family buildings to condos. If the 3-acre property owned by the Armenian Church near Orms and Jefferson St. were made available for redevelopment, new condo units could be built there.

Condominiums for Sale in Smith Hill Neighborhood

As of Nov. 1, 2019

<u>Address</u>	<u>Development</u>	<u>BR's</u>	<u>Size (net sf)</u>	<u>Price</u>	<u>Price/sf</u>
231 Douglas Ave.	The Annex	3	1,032	\$105,000	\$102

Note - This is a foreclosure "as is" sale

Sources: Redfin, Zillow, and Trulia & Cambridge Economic Research

Multi-Family Buildings for Sale in Smith Hill

Investment in two and three family apartments have traditionally served as a vehicle for homeownership for lower-income immigrant families that can generate a positive cash flow while covering their housing expenses. Two and three family structures have often accommodated 2 or 3 generations of a family, with parents on one floor, adult children on another, and grandparents in a third unit. According to the 2013-2017 American Community Survey, about 85% of the housing units in the neighborhood are in multi-family structures. The table below shows that just 12 of the estimated 2,038 multi-family units in the neighborhood⁵—less than 1% of the estimated total -- are listed for sale.

Current Multi-Family Buildings for Sale in the Smith Hill Neighborhood Oct. 31, 2019

<u>Address</u>	<u>No. of Units in Bldg.</u>	<u>Total BR's</u>	<u>Net Sq. Ft. Size (sf)</u>	<u>Avg. No. of BR's per Unit</u>	<u>Asking Price (000 \$ Rounded)</u>	<u>Price per sf</u>
30 Goddard St.	3	11	5,001	3.7	\$418,000	\$84
256 Douglas Ave.	2	8	2,004	4.0	\$180,000	\$90
46 Osborne St.	3	9	3,198	3.0	\$290,000	\$91
420 Orms St.	3	8	3,107	2.7	\$298,000	\$96
74-76 Osborne St.	3	6	3,054	2.0	\$315,000	\$103
34 Zone St.	2	7	2,415	3.5	\$250,000	\$104
23-25 Osborne St.	2	3	2,200	1.5	\$235,000	\$107
9 Frederick St.	3	9	3,000	3.0	\$329,000	\$110
59 Pekin St.	2	7	2,100	3.5	\$240,000	\$114
13 Pekin St.	2	7	2,317	3.5	\$265,000	\$114
25 Bernon St.	2	2	1,154	1.0	\$132,000	\$114
149 Bath St.	2	4.0	1,634	2.0	\$259,000	\$159
Averages	2.4	6.8	2,599	2.8	\$267,583	\$107

Sources: Loopnet, Eastcoastcpn.com, Zillow.com, Camiros, and Cambridge Economic Research

⁵ Estimates based on Camiros, Existing Conditions Report. The 29 units include the number of units within multi-family buildings, rather than the buildings themselves.

Sales prices range from \$132,000 for a 2 family building on Bernon St. up to \$418,000 for a larger 3 family building on Goddard St. Average prices per sq. ft. range from \$84 to \$159. As previously noted, these prices are far below those of Greater Boston and are likely to attract commuters into Smith Hill as well as owner-investors from outside of Rhode Island if the neighborhood is marketed to a wider audience.



Two-family building at 256 Douglas Ave, currently listed for \$180,000.

The Smith Hill Rental Market

Similar to trends observed in the residential sales market, rental units are scarce in Smith Hill. Rents in the neighborhood are inflated by the demand for student rentals, particularly by students from Providence College in nearby Elmhurst. In addition to Providence College, Smith Hill is popular with students from Johnson and Wales University, located downtown as well as Rhode Island College, which is in the Mount Pleasant neighborhood, just south of Elmhurst.

According to Strive Realty, an agency specializing in student rentals, some students from Bryant College in Smithfield, RI also rent apartments in the Smith Hill neighborhood. Smith Hill is more affordable than most areas that are closer to these colleges and has a bigger selection of rental units than are available in most neighborhoods. The neighborhood's location, near the city center, accounts for much of its popularity. According to a rental agent from Strive Realty, the number one reason why students choose to live in Smith Hill is that it is considered to be the "best party area"⁶. Most students renting in Smith Hill have cars and drive to campus. The table below evaluates potential demand for off-campus housing at these universities.

Estimated Demand for Off-Campus Housing

	<u>Student Population</u>	<u>Number Living Off Campus</u>
Providence College	4834	822
Johnson & Wales University	6628	3314
Rhode Island College	9000	<u>1128</u>
Total Students Living Off Campus		5264
Estimated Demand for Student Rental Units*		2106

* Assumes 2.5 students per unit. This is citywide demand.

Source: College websites.

⁶ Interview with Lexie Ray, Leasing Agent, Strive Realty.

Single Family Rentals

The table below shows that there are currently just six single-family houses for rent in the Smith Hill neighborhood. Rents range from \$1400 a month for a 3-bedroom house on Duke St. south of Smith St. and east of Chalkstone up to \$4500 for a six-bedroom house on Tyndall Ave. These rentals are targeted at students and others sharing. Rents range from \$467 per bedroom up to \$750 per bedroom, averaging \$600 per bedroom. The highest-priced houses located on Tyndall Ave, close to Providence College. According to Strive Realty, which specializes in student rentals, students sharing houses and apartments seek to pay around \$600 to \$675 a month, including utilities.

Single Family Houses for Rent in Smith Hill Neighborhood
Nov. 2019

<u>Address</u>	<u>900</u>	<u>Baths</u>	<u>Size (net sf)</u>	<u>Monthly Rent</u>	<u>Rent psf</u>	<u>Rent per BR</u>
10 Duke St.	3	1.5	832	\$1,400	\$1.68	\$467
73 Oakland Ave.	4	1.5	NA	\$2,000	NA	\$500
123 Bath St.	3	1		\$1,650	\$1.83	\$550
34 Zone St.	2	1.5	1,100	\$1,250	\$1.14	\$625
77 Tyndall Ave.	6	2	1,728	\$4,200	\$2.43	\$700
124 Tyndall Ave	<u>6</u>	<u>1.5</u>	<u>1,400</u>	<u>\$4,500</u>	<u>\$3.21</u>	<u>\$750</u>
Averages	4	1.5	1,140	\$2,500	\$1.77	\$600

Sources: Redfin, Zillow, Strive.com, and Trulia & Cambridge Economic Research

A review of current apartment rental listings shows a similar level of pricing as single-family houses. The table below shows current listings of apartments in the Smith Hill neighborhood. Currently, 15 units in the neighborhood are listed for rent. Apartment rents are about 12% lower than those for houses on a per-bedroom basis averaging about \$525 per bedroom.

Apartments for Rent in Smith Hill Neighborhood
 In the Smith Hill Neighborhood
 Nov. 2019

<u>Address</u>	<u>BR's</u>	<u>Baths</u>	<u>Size (net sf)</u>	<u>Monthly Rent</u>	<u>Rent psf</u>	<u>Rent per BR</u>
76 Osborn St.	2	1	1,000	\$1,100	\$1.10	\$550
66 Candace St.	2	1	900	\$1,075	\$1.19	\$538
55 Jewett St.	2	1	800	\$1,400	\$1.75	\$700
45 Ayrault St.	2	1	NA	\$1,200	NA	\$600
166 Jewett St.	2	1	925	\$1,150	\$1.24	\$575
105 Bath St.	2	1	NA	\$950	NA	\$475
93 Raymond St	3	1	NA	\$1,350	NA	\$450
651 Smith St.	3	1	NA	\$1,950	NA	\$650
6 Osborn St.	3	1	1,800	\$1,250	\$0.69	\$417
183 Oakland St.	3	1	1,450	\$1,725	\$1.19	\$575
16 Inkerman St.	3	1	1,000	\$1,400	\$1.40	\$467
16 Eaton St.	3	1	1,300	\$1,725	\$1.33	\$575
14 Eaton St.	3	1	1,300	\$1,725	\$1.33	\$575
496 Smith St.	4	1	NA	\$1,600	NA	\$400
203 Oakland	4	1	1,450	\$2,000	\$1.38	\$500
Averages	2.7	1	1,193	\$1,440	\$1.21	\$525

Sources: Apts.com, Zillow, Strive Realty, and Cambridge Economic Research

These rent levels exceed those that are affordable to most households in Smith Hill. The table below considers the median rent affordable to Smith Hill households. With a median income of \$34,400 a month, an affordable rent for the typical household in Smith Hill would be around \$660 a month.

Median Rent Affordable to Smith Hill Households

Median Income in Smith Hill Neighborhood	\$34,400
Median Affordable Annual Rent*	\$10,320
Affordable monthly rent	\$860
Minus Utilities & medical expenses	<u>\$200</u>
Estimated Median Rent Affordable to Smith Hill Households	\$660
*30% of Median Income	

Sources: 2013-2017 American Community Survey and Cambridge Economic Research

The gap between affordable and market rents in Smith Hill underlies the finding of the 2014-2017 Census that over 40% of households in the neighborhood are “rent burdened”.⁷ Such a gap leads to over-crowding when separate families and households must share a single unit.

The table below shows luxury or executive rentals available in the Smith Hill neighborhood. These are in the renovated Promenade development, just north of the Woonasquatucket River. On a square footage basis, rents here are about 80% higher than in standard rental units.

⁷ Camiros, Existing Conditions Report, November 2019. Rent burdened households are those paying more than 30% of their incomes for housing & utilities.

Executive Apartments Available for Rent in Smith Hill Neighborhood
in the Promenade Apartments in the Foundry
Nov, 2019

<u>Units</u>	<u>Baths</u>	<u>Size (net sf)</u>	<u>Monthly Rent</u>	<u>Rent psf</u>	<u>No, of Units Available</u>
Studio	1	550	\$1400	\$2.55	3
Studio	1	690	\$1600	\$2.32	3
1 BR	1	900	\$1850	\$2.06	1
1 BR Loft	1.5	950	\$2175	\$2.29	1
2 BR	2	1,300	\$1950	\$1.50	1
2 BR Loft	2	1,270	\$2900	\$2.28	1
Average	1.4	943	\$1979	2.17	-

Sources: Emily Gauthier, Leasing Agent, Promenade Apartments, Apts.com, & Cambridge Economic Research

A limited number of studio, 1-bedroom, and 2-bedroom units are available here. Rents range from \$1400 for a studio up to \$2900 for a large 2-bedroom loft apartment. According to the management office, many tenants commute by car and train to jobs in the greater Boston area. The Foundry development is about 12 to 15 minutes walk from the Station.

Conclusions

Similar to the situation elsewhere in Rhode Island, the demand for both rental and for sale properties outstrips supply. This has led to steep increases in both sales prices and rents over the past several years. Sitting tenants, who are likely to be paying lower rents than new tenants, are reluctant to move in view of rising rents as well as the shortage of options. Owners of multi-family buildings are reluctant to sell due to income appreciation resulting from rising rents. Likewise, property owners are less likely to sell in a climate of very tight supply due to lack of options.

There is a shortage of sites for new development. The release of the 3.2-acre site that is owned by the Armenian Church near Smith and Orms St. for redevelopment of rental and condominium units could help to abate this shortage. But prices for new residential development would likely be out of reach for existing residents for whom the neighborhood is growing increasingly unaffordable. Alternatively, this site could be used to develop purpose-built student housing. Concentrating students in purpose-built apartments buildings could help to ease the shortage of housing for working families in the neighborhood and could improve housing conditions in the neighborhoods.

The Commercial Real Estate Market

Overview

This analysis of the Smith Hill commercial property market first considers broad economic trends within the State of Rhode Island. We then look at recent activity in the development of new office, hotel, and other commercial space in the City of Providence. Finally, we focus on the supply of industrial, office, hotel, and retail space available for sale and rent in the Smith Hill neighborhood in view of future demand.

The Rhode Island Economy

Rhode Island's unemployment rate decreased from 4.2% in second quarter 2018 to 3.7% in second quarter 2019, just above the national average rate. The State continues to win new business through the state's jobs tax credits and other economic incentives. The state has been focusing its economic development efforts by investing in innovation. That includes fostering relationships between companies and the state's colleges and universities. Rhode Island's Innovation Voucher Program offers businesses with fewer than 500 employees grants of up to \$50,000 to fund research and development in cooperation with research institutions in the state.

In 2018 Amgen announced it would invest \$200 million on a next-generation biomanufacturing plant in West Greenwich — the first of its kind in the U.S. — that will employ 120 skilled workers. Biotech firm, Rubius Therapeutics began renovations on a former pharmaceutical plant in Smithfield that it is planning to open as an advanced manufacturing facility next year. Other tech and high growth firms like Orsted, GEV, Mobius, Epiq, Infosys, VistaPrint, GE, J&J, Agoda, E-Money Advisors, and Virgin Pulse are expected to add more than 1,000 jobs in the State over the next few years. ⁸

⁸ Hayes & Sherry, *Marketbeat Providence, RI, Office, Q2 2019*

Providence Commercial Real Estate Market Overview

Vacancy in commercial space (i.e., office and apartments) stood at 10.5% in June of 2019, a decrease of 1.5% over 12 mos. earlier. Meanwhile rents increased by nearly 5%. Availability is expected to continue to decrease over the next year and rents are forecast to continue to increase.

The most significant development projects in the state are happening in downtown Providence with numerous hotel and residential developments under construction. The first private office development in the Providence Design & Innovation Center, which is being developed on the I-195 land, opened in July of 2019. Wexford Innovation Center is a 200,000 sq. ft. \$88 million development developed with \$34 in state incentives and tax credits. Anchor tenants in the Center include Brown University, Cambridge Innovation Center, and Johnson and Johnson. The complex will be supported by new housing developments downtown like River House and Chestnut Commons. Development proposals for other I-195 parcels are in various stages of review.⁹

Wexford's innovation center is a key building block in Governor Gina Raimondo's development strategy, which is based on an economic model that has been used for decades in many other parts of the country. The formula calls for bringing together researchers, entrepreneurs, innovators, college grads, venture capitalists, and for-profit companies to collaborate and convert ideas into products, commercial enterprises and jobs.

The Cambridge Innovation Center has a reputation for attracting entrepreneurs, researchers and investors to its other sites in post-industrial cities like St. Louis and Rotterdam. The center is targeted at academic researchers from the state's colleges and universities, and is expected to stem the brain drain from Rhode Island by providing more jobs for graduates while attracting new workers to Providence.

There are currently no new speculative office developments under construction either downtown or in the suburbs, and few in the planning stages, making the market ripe for further tightening and upward pressure on rental rates.

Activity levels are expected to remain modest in 2019 as the office sector continues to tighten. Two separate trends are occurring and contributing to a tightening of the office supply; obsolete office buildings are being converted to apartments and institutions are purchasing office buildings for their own use. Landlords are expected to continue to gain power in negotiations, especially for Class A product. Overall the market is healthy and trending upward with moderate rent growth expected for the foreseeable future.

Providence needs a stronger network of professional services, i.e., lawyers, patent attorneys, accountants, data specialists and other professionals to support start-up and emerging companies. As the numbers grow, workers who have their pick of employers are expected to

⁹ Business Wire, *Wexford Innovation Center Opens in Rhode Island*, July 17, 2019.

consider Providence as the best place to take a chance on a career. All that will take time, and more taxpayers' subsidies, to make the economic model work. Still, early signs point in the right direction.

Governor Raimondo, a former venture capitalist, has used numerous incentive tools to develop what Providence has to offer. She has used an unprecedented array of taxpayer incentives and made acres of prime downtown land available to build the core of a new economy. Two years into her first term, she's already made more progress than her predecessors. But there's a lot of work that still needs to be done before all Rhode Islanders feel the results.

Economic Indicators

	Q2 18	Q2 19	12-Month Forecast
Providence Employment	732.8k	738.5k	▲
Providence Unemployment	4.2%	3.7%	▼
U.S. Unemployment	3.9%	3.6%	▼

Market Indicators (Overall, All Classes)

	Q2 18	Q2 19	12-Month Forecast
Total Available	12.0%	10.5%	▼
YTD Net Absorption (sf)	27k	-87k	▼
Under Construction (sf)	0k	191k	▲
Average Asking Rent*	\$18.62	\$19.48	▲

*Rental rates reflect gross asking \$psf/year

Overall Asking Rent/Overall Available
4-QTR TRAILING AVERAGE



The Hotel Market

Providence is undergoing a hotel boom. The city of Providence is seeing a surge in hotel proposals, with eight new hotels currently in various stages of development. Officials at the Providence Warwick Convention and Visitors Bureau say cities across the country are seeing a boom in the hotel and tourism industry, and Providence has seen record-setting occupancy in the past year-and-a-half.

Providence currently has 12 conventional hotels, not including bed-and-breakfasts and hostels. Ten of them, accounting for roughly 2,500 rooms, are within a one-mile radius of the Rhode Island Convention Center, according to Riel. When all of the newly proposed hotels are open, Providence will have 19 hotels and roughly 3,500 rooms.

Occupancy is averaging around 70% and has been reaching 80% in the summer months. According to the city, nearly 1000 new rooms are in various stages of planning and construction in downtown Providence in the following hotels:

- Homewood Suites Hotel, 5 Exchange Street, 120 rooms,
- Marriott Residence Inn, 111 Fountain Street, 168 rooms
- Hotel Beatrice, 28-32 Kennedy Plaza, 48 rooms
- Best Western GLo Hotel, 322 Washington Street, 76 rooms
- Aloft Hotel, Innovation Complex, 170 rooms
- Holiday Inn, 371 Pine Street, 91 rooms
- Hotel Hive, 187 Westminster Street, 129 rooms
- Woodspring Suites Hotel, 181 Corliss Street, 124 rooms.

Within the next year or so, occupancy rates are expected to skyrocket. Visitors will find more options than ever before, from bunk beds to penthouses to micro-lofts. New eateries will open up, partnerships will be forged with local restaurants and retailers.

According to the Providence Warwick Convention & Visitors Bureau (PWCVB), conventions, meetings, and sporting events contributed \$73.65 million in direct spending to the local economy. The PWCVB and the Rhode Island Sports Commission hosted 238 groups, which amounts to 112,464 “room nights,” as they’re known in the industry. Just the Dunkin Donuts Convention Center and Rhode Island Convention Center alone accounted for 71,904 room nights; that’s the equivalent of 196 rooms being taken every night of the year.

The strength of conventions and local sports – plus leisure travel and the academic sector – may explain why demand for a place to stay is steadily climbing. The average daily rate for a room jumped from \$165.52 to \$170.20 during the past 12 months. Occupancy has increased from 70.8 % to 74.2 percent; compared to the national average of 60% for similarly sized cities. In short, Providence needs hotels. And if all goes well, the city will have nearly 1,000 more rooms within the next year or so.

The Smith Hill Real Estate Market

This section reviews the supply of and demand for commercial property in the Smith Hill neighborhood. Industrial, office, retail/restaurant, and hotel space in Smith Hill are reviewed.

Industrial Property

Due to the trend toward conversion of industrial space to residential and office use (e.g., the Foundry project just north of the Woonasquatucket River) there is very little industrial or warehouse space available in the neighborhood. Currently, no industrial or warehouse properties are listed for sale. The table below indicates that, as of October 2019, there were only 3 listings of industrial space for rent.

Industrial Property for Lease in Smith Hill Neighborhood

As of October 2019

<u>Address</u>	<u>Type</u>	<u>Unit Size</u> <u>(sq. ft.)</u>	<u>Year</u> <u>Built</u>	<u>Annual</u> <u>Rent</u> <u>(psf)*</u>	<u>Note</u>
85 Whipple St.	Warehouse	25,992	1950	\$3.00	North of Ladder 133
6 Robin St.	Manufacturing/Warehouse	31,000	1960	\$6.00	Leased a week ago as 2 units
47-49 Rathbone St.	Incubator/Maker's Space	400 - 4,000	1935	\$12.00	Also listed as retail space

*All industrial and office rents quoted in this report are triple net, i.e., they exclude expenses of utilities, maintenance, and taxes.

Sources: Loopnet, EastCoastcpn.com, Agents, & Cambridge Economic Research

One of the listings, a 31,000 sq. ft. warehouse space at 6 Robin St., has since been leased as 2 warehouse units at \$6.00 sq.ft. Indicating some level of demand for warehouse/manufacturing spaces in central locations within the City. There is one large warehouse unit at 85 Whipple St., in the historic Oriental Mills Complex (just north of Ladder 133) listed for \$3.00 sq. ft. In addition, there are a variety of spaces ranging from 400 to 4000 sq. ft. available at 47-49 Rathbone St., just north of the River. Owners are trying to attract artisans and small crafts manufacturers to these spaces. At \$12.00 sq. ft., these units appear to be somewhat overpriced. They are also listed as retail space.

Office Space Available in Smith Hill

The table below indicates that there are just two office buildings for sale in the Smith Hill neighborhood. Both are on Smith St. The purchase prices for both buildings average \$134/sq.ft.

Office Space for Sale in Smith Hill Neighborhood

Oct. 2019

	<u>Class</u>	<u>Bldg. Area</u> <u>(Net sf)</u>	<u>Year Built</u>	<u>Sale Price</u>	<u>Price psf</u>
333 Smith St. - Next to Mortuary	C	3,920	1930	\$525,000	\$134
515 Smith St.- American Labor Bldg.	C	1,985	1972	\$265,000	\$134

Sources: Loopnet, EastCoastcpn.com, Agents, & Cambridge Economic Research

The building at 333 Smith St. (between Russell Boyle Mortuary and the Gryzch residence) was formerly occupied by Yoder & Tidwell, an architectural firm. The space was renovated in 2010. With nearly 6000 sq. ft., it is listed at \$525,000. This space is ideal for a law, design, or tech firm looking to own their office space.



6000 sq. ft. office building at 333 Smith St. renovated in 2010. Listed at \$525,000

The tables below list office spaces that are currently for lease in the Foundry Building, a renovated mill just north of the River and spaces for lease elsewhere in the neighborhood. There is a large supply of renovated office space available in the Foundry, a renovated mixed-use mill just north of the Woonasquatucket River. With more than 700,000 sq. ft. of space in 14 office buildings, the Foundry offers a range of flexible spaces with exposed brick, 10-foot windows, and free on-site parking. Rents are comparable to those in the CBD.

Office Space for Lease in the Foundry

30-Oct-19

<u>Address</u>	<u>Class</u>	<u>Bldg. Area (sf)</u>	<u>Year Built</u>	<u>Annual Rent (psf)</u>
315 Iron Horse Way	B	9,148	1885	\$23.50
317 Iron Horse Way (4 units)	B	686-25,900	1885	\$25.00
275 Promenade "Engineering Building"	B	5000-15000	1904	\$24.00
235 Promenade	B	331-16000	1872	\$26.00
297-299 Promenade	B	83,611	1920	\$23.75
291 Promenade St.	B	29,600	1940	\$26.50

Sources: Loopnet, EastCoastcpn.com, Agents, & Cambridge Economic Research

The table below lists non-foundry office space currently available in the Smith Hill Neighborhood. The building at 472 Smith St (Northeast Environmental Testing Laboratory), which was recently acquired by investors, has nearly 6000 sq. ft. of office space. The agent is marketing the building to microbreweries. With 12' ceilings, a roller door, and abundant natural light, this would be ideal for an established microbrewery looking to expand in an affordable area that is popular with students. The space at 49-47 Rathbone St. is flex space – it is advertised for industrial, office, & retail use.

Non-Foundry Office for Lease in Smith Hill

Oct. 2019

	<u>Class</u>	<u>Bldg. Area (sf)</u>	<u>Year Built</u>	<u>Annual Rent (psf)</u>
472 Smith St.	C	5,720	1945	\$10.00
49-47 Rathbone St.	C	610-8960	1935	\$12.00- \$14.75
10 Admiral St.	C	2050-13,000	1850	\$10.00

Sources: Loopnet, EastCoastcpn.com, Agents, & Cambridge Economic Rese



Former water-testing lab at 472 Smith St. The building is ideal for a microbrewery.

Units ranging from 2,000 to 13,000 sq. ft. are available at 10 Admiral St. at the former site of Oriental Mills -- a historic textile mill complex at 10 Admiral Street behind Ladder 133. The site consists of seven buildings, constructed between about 1860 and 1917, by a variety of textile manufacturers that operated on the site. The oldest building, from ca. 1860, was built by the Oriental Mills Manufacturing Company soon after its founding. Current tenants at 10 Admiral St. include data processing, medical, communications, transportation, and a range of business services. Occupancy of the 140,000 sq. ft. building is estimated at 90%, indicating a robust level of demand for competitively priced mill space in the neighborhood.

Retail/ Restaurant Space

As of October 2019, there was just one retail property for sale in the Smith Hill neighborhood – Nour Market and the residential building next door (dating from 1870) at 316 and 326 Smith St. at the junction of Smith St. & Orms St. These two properties and the small parking lot behind the market were listed for \$525,000 – or \$187.00 per sq. ft.

Despite the appearance of many underused storefronts on Smith St., field surveys showed that few units are actually vacant. Just two retail units in the neighborhood are advertised for rent.

Retail Space for Lease

October 2019

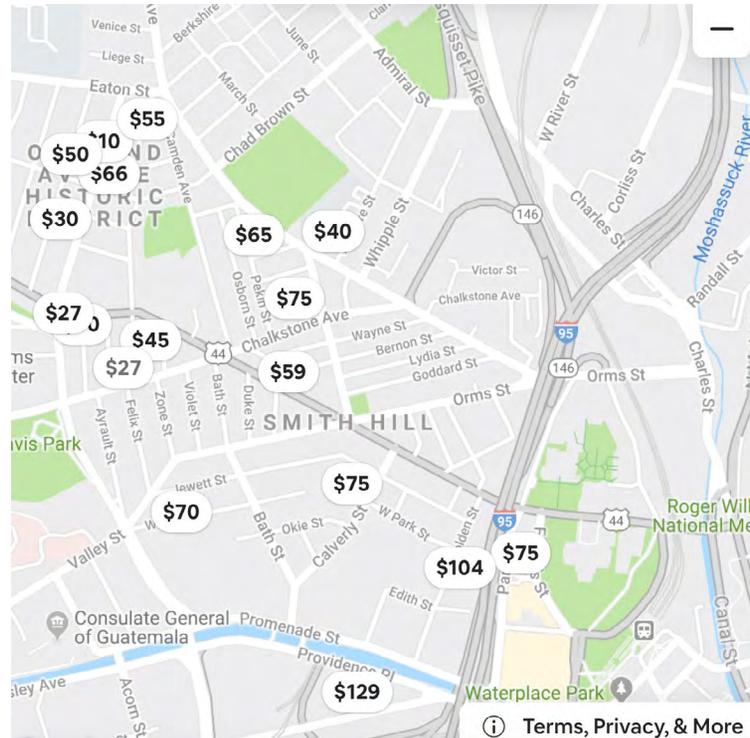
<u>Address</u>	<u>Class</u>	<u>Unit Size (Net sf)</u>	<u>Annual Rent</u>	<u>Description</u>
580 Chalkstone Ave.	C	2,000	\$24.00	Vacant Moreno Meat Market @ Chalkstone & Smith
297-299 Promenade	B	39,500	\$23.75	In Foundry

Sources: Loopnet, EastCoastcpn.com, Agents, & Cambridge Economic Research

The vacant former Moreno Meat Market shares a building with the Pizza Hut at 580 Chalkstone near the corner of Smith and Chalkstone. The 2000 sq. ft. unit is advertised for \$24.00/sq. ft., compared with a market rate rent of around \$10 to \$14 sq. ft. for retail space in the neighborhood.

The Hotel Market

At present, there is one upscale hotel/B&B in the Smith Hill neighborhood. This is the historic Christopher Dodge House on West Park St. just south of Smith St. This property is within walking distance of the State House and caters to business visitors here and elsewhere in the City. Rooms range from \$120 to \$150 a night. The map below shows the locations and prices of Airbnb rentals in the neighborhood.



Airbnb rentals currently listed in Smith Hill

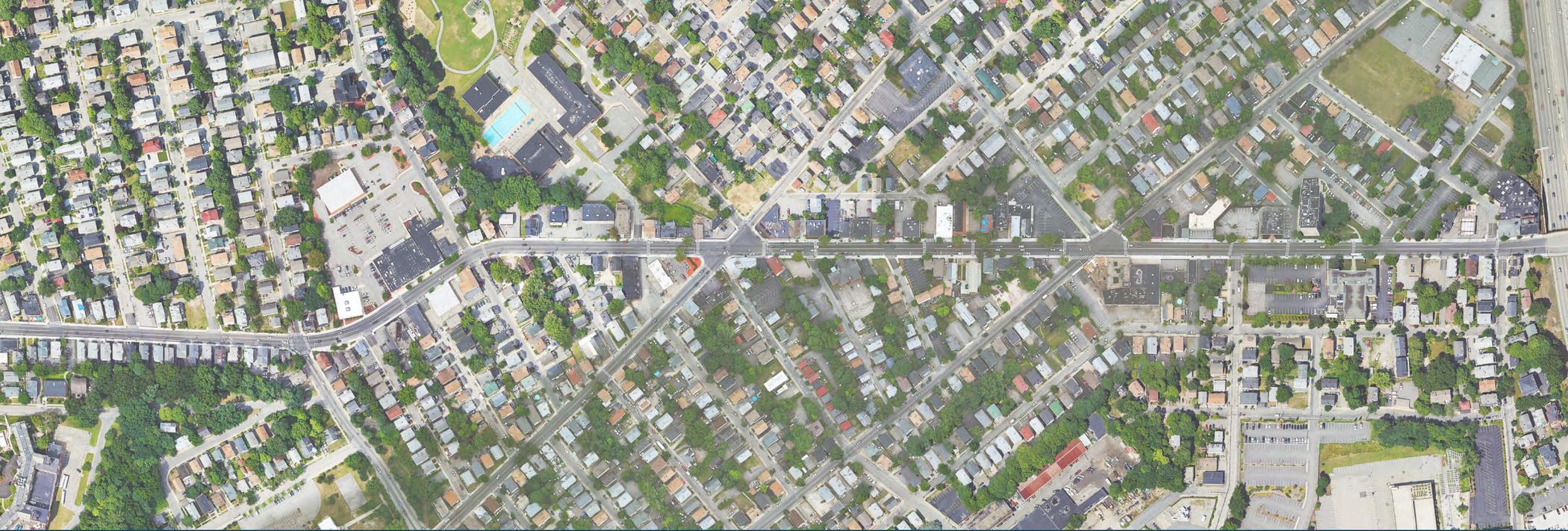
There are currently 52 short term rentals listed on the Airbnb site, ranging in price from around \$30 to \$104 per night. – very affordable by New England standards. Besides its proximity to downtown and to the State House, the City’s colleges and universities fuel demand for short-term accommodation. The neighborhood could likely support more short-term rentals. These are a good source of additional income for households with spare rooms to rent. However, encouraging conversion of apartments and houses to short term rentals will contribute to the growing shortage of affordable rentals for permanent residents and will add to the transient nature of the neighborhoods, which is exacerbated by student rentals. This is discussed further in the residential market analysis in this report.

Conclusions

The Providence economy is on an upward trajectory for the first time in years. Smith Hill, with its central location within the city and its popularity as a residence for students, not only from Providence College, but from a variety of colleges in the City,¹⁰ is in a position to attract new restaurants and entertainment venues as well as office tenants.

Two new restaurants, the Paris Bistro at Smith St, and Chengdu Taste at the former site of Little Chopsticks are expected to open in late 2019. However, there is a shortage of available space for restaurant, entertainment venues and offices. This shortage could be eased with the redevelopment of the property totaling over 3 acres near Orms & Jefferson that is owned by Sts. Sahag & Mesrob Armenian Church. This property is currently zoned R-3 for multi-family residential use. Rezoning for mixed-use development could support both residential and supporting commercial use as well as hotel and short-term rental developments.

¹⁰ According to Lexie Ray, Leasing Agent with Strive Realty student rental agency, Smith Hill is popular with students from Johnson & Wales University, Rhode Island College, and Bryant University in Smithfield as well as the nearby Providence College.



Smith Street Revitalization Plan

July 2020